VOLUME 16
NUMBER 7

AMAZING STORIES

JULY
1943

THE RETURN OF HAWK CARSE by ANTHONY GILMORE

276! PAGES!

AMAZING STORIES

JULY 25c

BLITZKRIEG IN THE PAST

by JOHN YORK CABOT

TELL-TALE FLAKES?

ITCHY SCALP?

UGLY SCALES?

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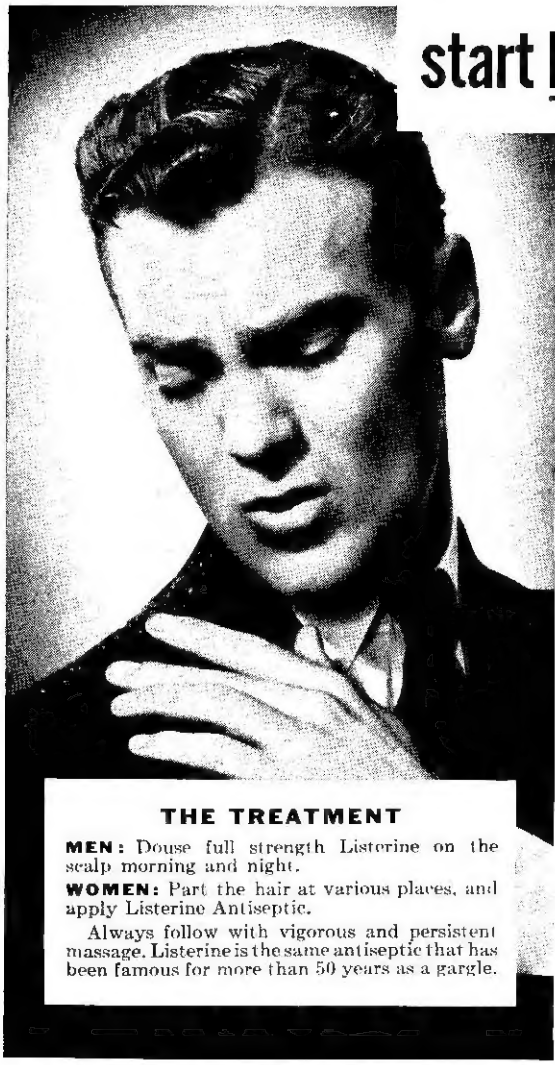

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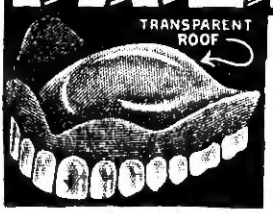

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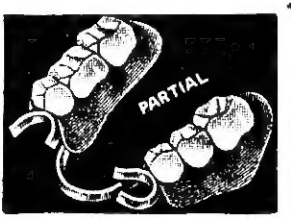

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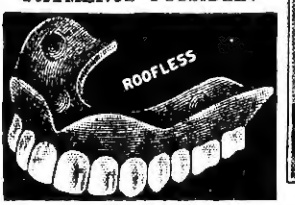

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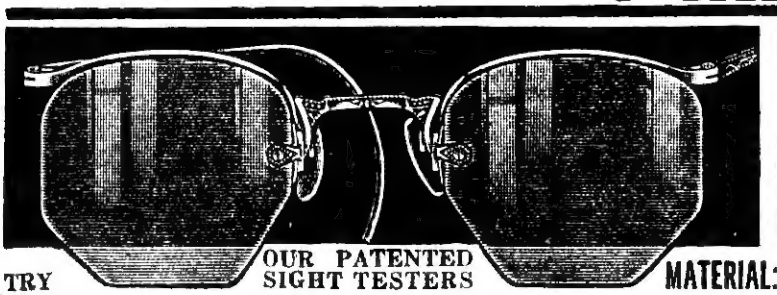

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VOLUME 16
NUMBER 7

AMAZING STORIES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

JULY
1942

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Front cover painting by J. Allen St. John illustrating a scene from "Blitzkrieg In The Past"
Back cover painting by James B. Settles depicting the "Radium Airship Of Saturn"
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AMAZING STORIES JULY 1942

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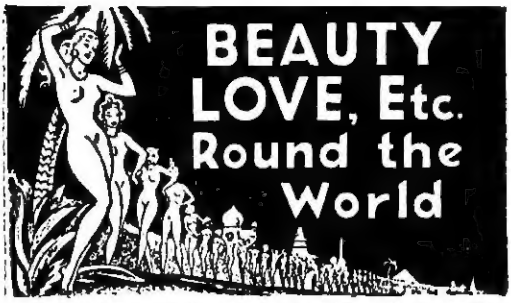

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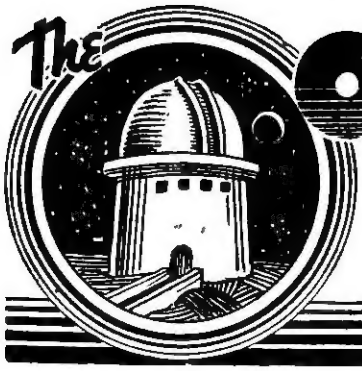


The OBSERVATORY by THE Editor

DID you ever stop to wonder just how an editor knows he has a good issue or a bad one? How he knows the readers will like it? The fact of the matter is that he doesn't. In this editor's case, he just buys stories he enjoys reading, and he's lucky enough to be an average reader—or in brief, a fan, just as you are, Joe Fan, and Alice Fanette!

But there are some interesting sidelights on what happens to an editor's opinions during the course of a month. Here are some of them.

THE art director, inspecting the first copy to come off the press, turns to the pages on which lead-page layouts appear. If it is a dramatic illustration, type sizes are as he specified, there's enough "air" between the letters, and a caption exactly fills the space specified, and there are no "widows" (short, awkward lines); if the whole book does not offend his artistic sense—then it is a good issue!

THE editor, that's us, looks at it, and sees that the typesetter's errors have not been corrected as he directed, and we howl about the miserable make-up job. Or the captions give away the story, or the illustrations should have illustrated a different scene. Or an ad on page 34 should have been on page 274. That's *bad*, we say.

THE circulation director looks at it and says yellow is a bilious color, and the cover will not attract customers, but repel them.

AND all of them come to your managing editor and (finding him sitting here chuckling because the issue is full of stories that he finds enjoyable after still another reading) tell him how atrocious the issue is. Whereupon he goes out and shoots himself. Or he would, if he didn't know one sure thing—the reader is the man who counts!

SO that's how we know we have a good issue! Nobody can really offer help who *doesn't* read it for entertainment! But you fans like it because you can't see the bad letter-spacing, the "widows," the ill-chosen color of the cover, the "other illustration that might have been used," and all these other things. You have read printed words that carry you to excitement and adventure, taken you to new worlds, broken the humdrum of your own life, allowed you to be another person for a time. You have enjoyed yourself. And by golly, we'll keep on giving you enjoyment, because each month you readers send us scads of letters telling us which stories you enjoyed. How can we miss with help like that!

THE whole truth of the matter is, that the art director *has* done a good job, the color on the cover *is* good, the ads *are* in the right places, the errors *have* been carefully corrected, and the *best* possible job has been done by all concerned. Yes, we all slip up once in a while, that it really isn't so important, because as a whole, we have created an illusion, we have given substance to imagination, we have entertained thousands of people. So, if you, as a reader, have seen some of these little things, you have passed them by, knowing that perfection is impossible.

WHICH brings us to this issue. And to indulge our ego a bit, we think that here is one issue that's as near that perfect peak as we've ever reached. Let's just take a glance at the stories in the 276 pages which constitute our efforts this month.

FIRST, and foremost, of course, is the return of the most famous character ever to come out of science fiction, the one and only Hawk Carse, spaceman extraordinary. Ten years ago, this character came to life on paper, and gave to science fiction an impetus it has never lost. He was the first real man to hit the highways of space. You loved him—you never forgot him. And now he's back, penned by the only author who ever caused a nation of fans to attempt a mass detective hunt in an effort to drag him out into the open for a personal ovation—and failed! *Who is Anthony Gilmore?* they cried.

ONE fan, comparing literary style, sent Victor Rousseau a telegram congratulating him on

his Hawk Carse stories: Rousseau wired back saying thanks. Later Rousseau said: "I could not deny myself the satisfaction of accepting such ardent admiration. I only wish that I *was* the mysterious Anthony Gilmore!"

BUT the whole truth of the matter was very simple—Anthony Gilmore is Anthony Gilmore, and when your editor wrote him, asking for more Hawk Carse, he got it! So here it is. A great story, a great character—and a modest creator. Perhaps that is the real secret of his success. It takes a real man to create a real character. Perhaps we might say that Hawk Carse is Anthony Gilmore. Does it really matter?

IF you like humor (and we know you do) you'll go for Milton Kaletsky's story in this issue. And it's timely too, since the election campaign is in full swing at the present moment. However, we hope some of our national elections don't pan out like this!

DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN finally does that long space story you've asked for. "Squadron of the Damned" is the title. Will you keep us posted on your opinion of O'Brien's space stories?

OF course, our cover story, written around the cover by J. Allen S. John, is in the hands of a capable man. We still remember Cabot's first story, which was a short, and his string of successful shorts thereafter. He was so good on these lengths we kept him there. That was one of our mistakes, but we rectified it after he wrote his first novelet. Now when we want a good yarn, long or short, we say "call Cabot!"

NELSON S. BOND winds up his Angkor serial in this issue, directly on the heels of news that he's working on another novel for us. Hurry, say we. We like to read his stories as much as you do!

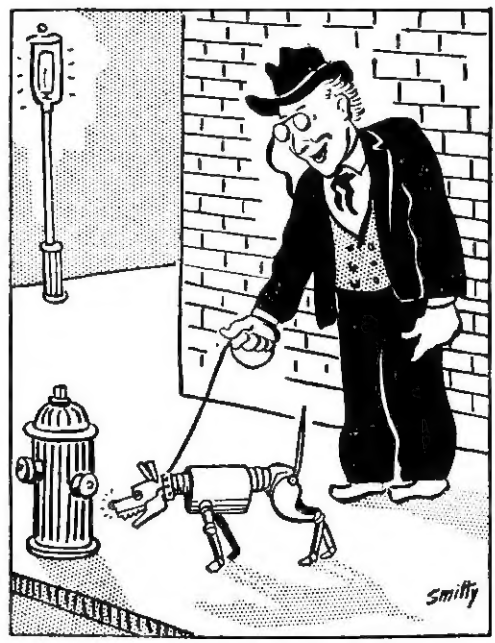
AT the present moment Dwight V. Swain, author of "The Powers of Darkness" is in the office, delivering another manuscript. Here's another lad who came out of nowhere and rang the bell without any hesitation. He's only written one story that we've been forced to reject, so far. That's a fine score for a writer who never tried the pulps before! Maybe there *are* writers who are born! (Okay, Bloomington, Illinois, we heard you—but it *wasn't* a pun!)

FOR you Paul fans, we might point out that this famous artist is inaugurating a new series of paintings, depicting the gods of Olympus, on the back cover of our companion magazine, *Fantastic Adventures*. Why don't you pick up a copy of the big new July issue, which has the first of the new series, which is Zeus, the Thunderbolt God. Incidentally, the magazine is now in its new garb of 244 pages, almost as big as *Amazing Stories*.

ON page 264 you will find the names of the winners of our contest story "The Perfect Trap," by Miles Shelton, which ran in the April issue. The volume of replies to this contest were such that we barely finished judging them before the deadline for this issue came along. Thus, we are presenting only the names of the winners, and sending out prize awards. Next month we will present the winning solutions.

RECENTLY artist Magarian and author Don Wilcox got together and the result was that Magarian did a series of illustrations based on ideas that Wilcox had in his notebook. These illustrations are now being turned into stories by Wilcox, and we expect the unique arrangement to result in something quite fine. At least, the illustrations ought to fit the stories to the last detail.

NEXT month we begin a new serial by G. G. Irwin, called "The Vengeance of Martin Brand." Here's a space story that ought to sock you between the eyes. It has the most amazing characters we've ever seen in a science fiction story—and the deepest human problem that ever happened in space. You won't want to miss it, both because of the story, and because it features a cover painting by McCauley, now lost to us for the duration, presenting the Mac Girl in her second appearance in *Amazing Stories*. *Rap*

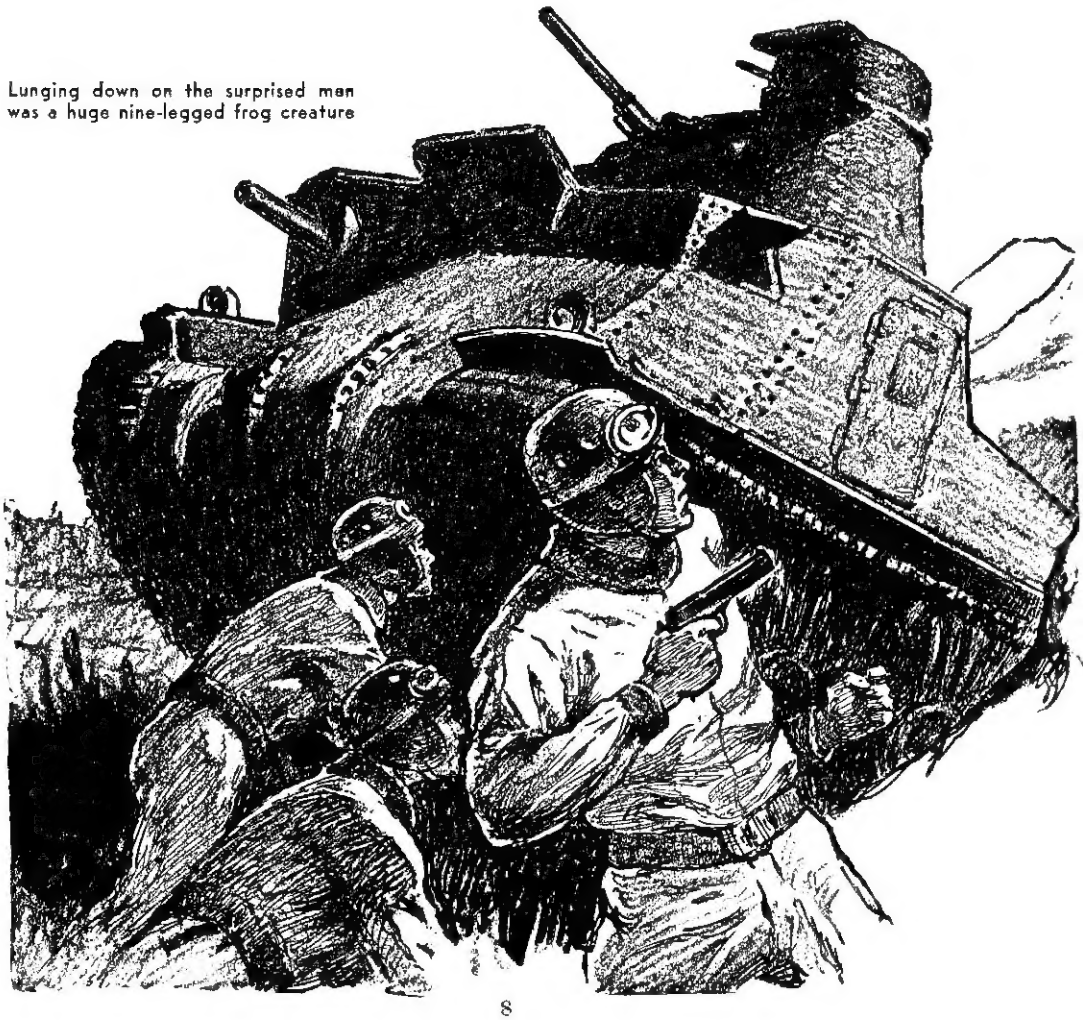


"Now for the supreme test!"

BLITZKRIEG IN THE PAST

by JOHN YORK CABOT

This United States Tank division found itself facing something far more terrible than Japs—across a million years of time!



Lunging down on the surprised men was a huge nine-legged frog creature

I REMEMBER that we had just been issued our new uniforms, and that I had just wrestled into mine and was standing back away from the mirror above my bunk getting an eyeful of myself and feeling pretty classy. Classy and proud as hell to belong to an armored division of Uncle Sam's Army.

At a quick glance the new raiment looked like nothing more than an olive drab suit of coveralls belted at the waist and strapped to the shoe tops. But my division insignia, stitched to the shirt front, with the lightning bolt of crimson flashing through a triangle of blue, was the thing that really gave the outfit class.

If you've never met a blitz-baby, a soldier of an armored division, you don't know anything about the *real* backbone of this man's army. 'Cause whether the public is aware of it or not, *we* know that the tank corps is the finest, fightingest, classiest branch of the U. S. Armed Forces.

And the U. S. Tank Corps is the finest in the world.

We're going to prove it in Australia, and in Burma, and in Libya. Yes, and we're going to prove it in Norway, and France, and Germany; in the Philippines and in Tokyo.

We'll shove so many tanks at the Nazis and the Japs and the Wops that they'll wish they never heard of mechanized warfare! It'll be blitz tactics by the best blitzers in the world.

And right now, the maddest!

So you see where that puts us. You see why you have to excuse the fact

that maybe we're a little cocky, a little clannish, and a little pitying toward the sissies in the infantry, the paratroops, the quartermaster corps, the artillery, and the air corps—just to name a few of the lesser branches of the service.

Hell, all the time you hear statements made to the effect that there is more *esprit de corps,* more first rate morale in the armored divisions of the United States Army than in any other arm of the service. And if you were one of us, you'd believe it.

So there I was, admiring the new togs and puffing out my chest like I said, when into my barracks trooped Rusty Harrigan and Leeds McAndrews.

Rusty and Leeds are my buddies. We three comprise the unit operating one light tank. Rusty is the gunner—and what an eye he has—and Leeds is the guy in the tower who kicks the hell out of my skull while signaling me to turn this way and that.

"Well, well, well," Rusty said most sarcastically, catching sight of my preening. "You gonna pose for one of them covers on a picture magazine?"

Rusty is red headed, Irish, freckled and sharp tongued with his wit. He stands five six in his sox, and has a pair of shoulders that would look large on a guy twice his size.

Rusty also has big, red-knuckled mitts. Hanging loose at his sides they look like twin bunches of crimson bananas. But, baby, those mitts can caress a motor like a super-skilled surgeon. And they can trigger a machine gun the way I hear Billy the Kid used to twirl a six-shooter.

"So what?" I snapped. "I think they look plenty classy, these new togs."

Leeds McAndrews came in with that mild, drawly voice of his.

"Burt is right, Rusty. Now, we won't be mistaken for common garden variety soldiers."

LEEDS is tall and thin. His hair is black and frames a long, somber, studious pan. If you'd put horn-rimmed specs on his nose, he'd look like an elongated edition of Harold Lloyd back in the days of silent pics. Some day he'll be a brass hat, and one of the best damned tank tactic strategists. There's nothing he doesn't know that he can't learn if you give him five minutes to concentrate.

I grinned: "You said it, Leeds. Hell, four days ago some floozie was wandering around camp looking the place over, and she stops me to ask if we're part of the coast artillery. Imagine!"

"And if she sees you in this new Government Issue field uniform and shock proof headgear, she'll want to know if you're first string on the football team," Rusty said.

But I noticed *he'd* donned the new issue, and that *his* barrel chest was puffed out a mile.

"What did you come in here for?" I asked. "Fashion parade?"

Rusty grinned. "I just wanted to tell you that you and me and Leeds are gonna get a chance to get this new issue gear all nasty dirty this afternoon."

"What?" I yelped. We were all slated for town tour that afternoon.

"It's the truth, Burt," Leeds broke in. "Special orders. Our unit has been assigned to test duties this afternoon. We're to report to Major Hobart right after noon chow."

I sat down on my bunk.

"But I made a date, damn it," I groused.

"So did I," Rusty echoed. "A little southern peach. Boy what a figure!"

Leeds grinned widely. "Thank God I was going to wait and take my chances."

Rusty scowled angrily. "Why in hell

can't they get another tank besides ours?"

"We're the best," Leeds said simply.

"Yahh," said Rusty. "We're the top tank team. And what do we get for it? Time off? Medals? Yahh!" He slumped down bitterly on the bunk next to mine.

"There'll be a gold star on your report card, Junior," I ribbed him, "if you just be patient."

"Sometimes," Rusty said morosely, looking at the ceiling, "I think my insides must be shook up like a milkshake, or a Tom Collins."

"With you it'd be more like a Tom Collins," Leeds predicted.

"Bounce, bang, bounce, bang, dust in your nose and your throat. Bounce bang, bounce bang, bounce—" Rusty chanted.

"The needle's stuck in that record," I cut in. "Someone turn it over."

Rusty glared at me. "What I mean," he said fiercely, "is why did I ever get in this outfit anyway?" He shook his head. "Sometimes I think I was crazy to join."

"Why don't you ask for a transfer?" I asked. "There ought to be some lace and lovely branch of the service that could use you."

Rusty sat bolt upright.

"Are you crazy? Do I look like a *walking* soldier?" He demanded. "And besides, what'd happen to our armored division if I quit?"

"That's right, Rusty," Leeds McAndrews said dryly. "You wait until they can find a man good enough to replace you."

"Hah!" Rusty snorted. "I should wait that long!"

It's like that in the armored divisions. Beef, beef, beef. But just offer any one of them a chance to transfer to another branch of the service, and run, mister, run.

Leeds turned away. "Think I'll get back to my barracks," he said. "I want to do some reading." He left.

"Smart guy, Leeds," Rusty observed after he'd gone. "Alla time reading, reading. Hell, I'll bet he's read so much he's hadda start all over again on the books he began with."

"That would be impossible, Rusty," I told him. "Impossible for one man in a thousand lifetimes."

Rusty blinked. "Yeah?"

"Yeah."

Rusty considered this silently. A great man on a motor, a genius with a gun, Rusty.

"That's a lotta books," he said at last.

I nodded soberly. "That's it exactly." I rose, stretching and yawning. Rusty looked up at me.

"Where you going?" he asked.

"Think I'll wander over to the canteen," I said. "Want to pick up a magazine that's out today."

Rusty nodded, leaned back and closed his eyes. . . .

LEEDS and Rusty and I met outside the door of Old Blue Bolt—he's Major Hobart, commanding officer of our Tank Unit—shortly after noon mess.

"Did you call your southern peach and cancel this afternoon's engagement?" Leeds asked.

Rusty snapped his fingers. "Cripes! I knew there was something I forgot!"

I grinned, and Leed's somber eyes twinkled. We had something to keep Rusty sweating about all afternoon now.

And then the door of the office opened and Old Blue Bolt himself stood there, looking at us with those steely blue eyes of his. He was a rugged, carved out of rock-ish old duck. Former cavalry officer with Teddy

Roosevelt at San Juan, he'd won his comish in the Spanish War while still a punk of eighteen. In the World War I, he'd seen action as a Captain in charge of the first tank units of the A.E.F.

His voice was hard, and the words came from him like bits of shrapnel exploding at you.

"Sergeant Joyce," he snapped, "your crew ready?"

We'd all gone ramrod to attention. And now I saluted.

"Reporting, sir," I said.

"At ease," Old Blue Bolt snapped. "Come inside with me."

We entered his office, and he waved us to chairs as he stepped to his desk and pulled several operations maps from his desk. Then he turned back to us, papers in hand.

"I've picked you men for an experimental job this afternoon," he said, "because of your record. Your task won't be difficult, and will consist merely of a routine tank reconnaissance operation—over terrain which we have mapped here."

Old Blue Bolt handed the operational maps to me, and I glanced at them briefly.

"Mechanics are already installing the device you are to take along with you in the M-3 tank I want you to use," he went on. "You needn't be too concerned with its operation—that's more a matter for our testing engineers."

"What sort of a device is it, sir?" I asked.

"A rather startling development in tank radio communication," Old Blue Bolt answered. "If it works." He paused. "However, your job today will not, to repeat, concern operation. We're merely installing the mechanism, turning it on full power, and seeing how it stands up under the actual physical thumping around it will get from standard tank reconnaissance such as you will go through today."

"I see, sir." I declared.

Old Blue Bolt suddenly snapped a salute. "That is all. See you on the garrison grounds in ten minutes. Have your M-3 ready to roll by that time."

Leeds, Rusty, and I were kicking through the dust of the testing grounds three minutes later.

"Why in the blazes don't they put us through the paces right here on the reservation?" Rusty demanded. "Good Lord, this'll be a mere two hundred mile jaunt. A hundred miles each way."

Leeds was looking at one of the map copies I'd given him. He grinned. "You're a little off, Rusty. It'll be a hundred and thirteen miles going, and one-eleven coming back."

Rusty shrugged. "Okay, okay, twenty-four miles more doesn't make it any sweeter."

"Stop thinking about your southern peach," I ribbed him. "This'll just be a jeep jaunt."

Rusty waved a big paw disgustedly through the air. "Yah—a nine hour haul."

"Off again, Rusty," Leeds put in. "Twenty-five miles an hour top in an M-3, you know. Think for a minute we can average that?"

Rusty shrugged his shoulders. He glared at me. "Put me in the steer nest of that bounce buggy and I'll average it!" he promised.

"No thanks," I said. "I want a few bones left unfractured."

THE special equipment was already inside our M-3 when we rolled out onto the garrison grounds in it some five or six minutes later. We'd only had time to make the very briefest scrutiny of it, and with the exception of Leeds McAndrews, who whistled interestedly at the sight of the complicated little box of tubes and wires, there

wasn't much you could gather from such a quick peek.

"Looks like something outta Buck Rogers," Rusty had grumbled. "Give me a gun any day for simplicity."

"When we clear the reservation I'd like to take a closer look at it," Leeds had said. "I think I've got an idea of what it's supposed to do."

"Rusty'll relieve you in the tower," I promised him, "once we get out of sight. But for godsakes don't try to take the damned thing apart."

On the garrison grounds Old Blue Bolt and several other brass hats waited for us. There was a short, dumpy, bald-headed guy in civvies with them. We rolled to a stop and got out, while they clambered inside the tank for a last check-up. From the conversation, it became evident that the dumpy, bald-headed little guy in civvies was the inventor of the device, and that the War Department was giving him a preliminary test on it.

While we waited outside, I noticed Leeds squinting up at the sky curiously several times.

"What's wrong?" I asked. "Stormy weather ahead?"

That's Leeds McAndrews, just like I said. There's damned little he doesn't know a lot about, even to the weather. And he doesn't depend on a bunion for that, either.

Leeds nodded soberly. "We're due for some wet stuff," he observed quietly.

"Hot damn!" Rusty had overheard him. "It'll kill that blank-blank dust." A big grin split his mug.

"And cut down our time," I reminded him.

The grin left Rusty's face. "Hell," he said, "you never win in this man's army."

Old Blue Bolt, the officers, and the inventor were clambering out of the tank again. On the ground, Old Blue Bolt snapped a salute.

"You have your orders, sergeant," he said. "Carry on!"

CHAPTER II

Georgia Disappears

HALF an hour later we were making a maximum twenty-five per along a smooth enough dirt straightaway. But the day was a scorcher, and the dust kept sifting through the front vision slot with choking monotony.

I was beginning to agree with Rusty as to his first wish for the deluge Leeds had promised. My back was drenched with sweat, and the perspiration cascaded down my forehead like a miniature Niagara.

Up above me, getting plenty of fresh, clean air on his lean face, Leeds McAndrews had the gall to keep up a cheerfully incessant whistle. And to my right, Rusty accompanied him with a steady monotone of profanity.

Rusty interrupted his blasphemous monotone long enough to chant despairingly.

"Cool," he said. "Clean . . . fresh . . . cool . . . clean . . . fresh . . . cool!"

"What's eating you?" I demanded loudly.

"I was thinking," he said, "of how nice it wouldda been had I joined the Air Corps insteadda this outfit."

I silenced him with a glare.

"What about that damned rain Leeds promised?" Rusty yelled after a minute or so.

I knocked Leeds' leg with the side of my head. I looked up as he peered down at me.

"Where in the hell's that rain?" I asked.

Leeds grinned. "Another twenty minutes," he promised.

I looked at the operations map at my elbow. Another twenty minutes would find us in rough enough terrain without mud to mess through. I sighed. Maybe Rusty was right. You never really win.

But Leeds had miscalculated, for once. We got our rain in fifteen minutes, not twenty. Got it while we were still traveling the smooth dirt straightaway.

I heard it patter on the tank, lightly at first. But the drops were big, and pretty soon they were coming harder and faster, and all of a sudden the smooth dirt straightaway was covered in a sheeting downpour.

"Turnabout!" Rusty grinned, yelling. He pointed his finger up toward the tower where Leeds was now taking a drenching. "First we bake—then he drowns!"

Leeds kicked my shoulder in a stop signal. We halted a few yards forward. I moved aside, and he clambered down.

"How about Rusty taking the crow's nest while I get a look at the radio device we're lugging?" Leeds asked.

I looked at Rusty, whose face had suddenly gone dark.

"Nuts to that noise!" he protested sharply. "The minute it gets wet up there you decide to change places with me. Yah!"

"There was no squawk when I first mentioned it," Leeds reminded Rusty.

"It seemed like a good deal, then," Rusty countered. "Thought it would give me a little pure air for a change."

Leeds grinned. "In other words you had no objections to it when we were getting started, is that right?"

Rusty nodded, starting to say something.

Leeds cut in. "And in other words you sanctioned a bargain then, but want to back out now."

"Yeah, but—"

"Unforseen circumstances can't make an agreement any less binding, ethically," Leeds cut him off again.

Rusty muttered something hot. Then he sighed. "Every time I try to argue with you, McAndrews, I lose my shirt." He stood up and moved around, permitting Leeds to slide into the position he'd vacated.

"Up you go," I grinned.

Tight-lipped, Rusty clambered up into the tower. And when he gave my shoulder the starting nudge with his foot you'd think he'd wanted to root a field goal from the fifty yard line.

"Hey!" I yelled. "A little easy there!"

We rumbled off once more, and through my vision slot I could see the rain slashing down even more viciously than before, while the sky grew ominously darker and the first splitting explosions of thunder sounded in the distance.

ABOVE me, I could hear Rusty's faint, wrathful grumblings. Leeds was busy in his inspection of the special radio apparatus, lost in blissful fascination at the intricate arrangement of it.

We clanked along the dirt straightaway in that fashion for another fifteen minutes, while the fury of the rain and the crashing reverberations of thunder grew greater with every passing minute.

Jagged flashes of lightning were now splitting the sky on an average of once every two or three minutes.

Then Rusty was kicking my shoulder hard in a stop signal.

I slowed the tank to a halt.

Rusty's head peered down.

"Do I have to stay up here and be top man on a lightning rod?" he demanded plaintively.

I glanced at Leeds. "How about it? Had enough look-see?"

Leeds looked up. "Eh? Oh—" He grinned. "Tell that red head I'll relieve him in another five minutes."

I passed on the information. Rusty glowered.

"Okay," he said sullenly. "But I'll be counting off them five minutes like a clock."

I glanced at my operations map, and peered out to see our road position.

"That next fork up there," I told Rusty, "is where we go off over the bounding hills and dales. Don't let me miss it."

Rusty muttered something indicating none too pleased agreement and sat back up in his perch.

I started up again, just as a particularly brilliant flash of lightning whitened the darkened sky. I heard Rusty curse angrily in his discomfort.

Leeds looked up. "Wonder if they counted on an electrical storm playing hell with this device?" he asked.

"I don't suppose so," I answered. "Why? Something wrong?"

Leeds shook his head. "It's skittering around like a water bug in a whirlpool," he announced.

I shrugged. "That's not our worry."

"No," Leeds admitted. "No, it isn't." He went back to his study of the device.

I got the turn kick from Rusty, then, and wheeled our M-3 down off the straightaway across a rutted field. The going wasn't too bad, although now and then we made a camel-like lurch as we crossed a narrow ditch or gully.

The thunder was crackling almost constantly, now, and its din, plus the incessant deluge of rain on the tank structure and the noise of the M-3's motor itself, made further conversational exchanges—even shouting at the top of our lungs—more than impossible.

Mentally, I was hoping that the terrain over which we were headed would not become bog and mud too quickly; for the operations map at my elbow indicated that this was just a brief stretch and that we'd emerge on a straightaway again in another few miles.

I shot a glance at Leeds occasionally, and from the expression on his somber, studious pan, he seemed still worried about the operation of the radio device our run was testing.

But that was Leeds, of course. He was that type of guy. Always stewed and fretted over everything, feeling responsible for the perfection of the smallest details of anything remotely connected with our assignments.

Up above me Rusty had subsided. Or perhaps he hadn't. At any rate the din of the storm and the usual clanking cacophony of our M-3 drowned out whatever profane observations he might have had on our progress.

I was just figuring that the fury of the electrical storm was getting to be more than anyone, even Leeds, had expected, when it happened.

The black storminess of the sky became a sudden, blazing sheet of white flame; and hell exploded with the tremendous crash of a thunderbolt.

I remember the force of the shock throwing me from my seat, and that, with subconscious forethought, I snapped off the power on my way to the tank floor.

VAGUELY, Leeds' voice, raised shoutingly, came to me; and I seemed to hear Rusty's angry yelling in the background of fog that was settling over me. It was only later that

I found out I'd cracked my head with tremendous force against a turret panel on my right, and that merely the presence of my safety helmet saved me from splitting my skull in two.

Then the lights were out for me completely.

"Here . . . no . . . rub his wrists first . . . yes . . . that's . . . right. Let me . . . better . . . beginning . . . open his eyes . . . . Coming around . . . now."

Those were the words that hammered at the back of my brain as I began to blink through the fog and regain consciousness. I was aware of Rusty's mug, and Leeds' somber pan both bending over me.

I sat up suddenly.

"Jeeudas," I yelled, "what time is it?"

I must have been blinking foolishly as I gaped around at my surroundings.

"You're not in the barracks," Rusty said, "and reveille hasn't just sounded. Calm down. You're all right. We were just struck by a lightning bolt, that's all."

"Lighting?" I gasped.

"Sure," Leeds McAndrews said dryly, "that's all."

"Wheeeeeeeeew!" I ran a shaky hand along my face.

Rusty was grinning now, and he rose, half bending, making me suddenly realize we were still inside the tank.

"How about you guys?" I demanded. "How come you weren't knocked silly?"

"We were knocked flat," Leeds remarked. "Rusty was just clambering down inside to beef about getting relief when the bolt hit. I was banged face forward on my button. Rusty hung on for dear life."

"But the tank," I protested, looking around at the somehow undamaged mechanism inside our M-3, "should have been cindered!"

Leeds nodded. "Thank God it wasn't," he agreed, "even if it should have been. It was just knocked ahead, literally through the air, for a distance of no less than fifteen yards."

I whistled. "Honest to God?" I demanded, shuddering.

Leeds held up his hand. "Honest Injun," he said.

"What about the precious equipment?" I asked suddenly.

Leeds shrugged. "Seems to be undamaged. Can't be sure," he told me. "But I have a funny hunch that it was the cause of attracting the bolt in the first place."

Rusty knotted his red brows in disbelief. "How?" he challenged.

Leeds gave him a look. "I could explain," he said flatly, "but I'd be wasting my breath."

"Yah!" Rusty said scornfully.

I clambered to my feet, aware suddenly that my knees were all of a sudden very rubbery indeed, and stood there in a half bend.

"I better get out and make a check of this blitz box before we try to go any further," I said.

Leeds nodded. "That's a good idea."

Rusty's face was a portrait of disappointment. "You mean you figger on going ahead?" he demanded.

"Why not?" I asked him.

"And get hit again by a bolt?" he demanded.

"The thunder's stopped," I said, cocking my head to one side, "and, if my ears and sixth sense aren't wrong, our storm is clearing up."

Leeds nodded in sudden surprise. "Damned if you aren't right," he agreed. "No more rain spattering the sides. Let's pile out and look around while you check the M-3."

Leeds was first up and out. Rusty followed him, and I brought up the rear.

So we got Leeds' choked exclamation of astonishment first.

Then Rusty's hoarse, bewildered bellow.

And then I was looking at it.

Looking at the terrain surrounding us, I mean. The thick, tangled, semi-tropical jungle that stretched for miles to either side. The chalk cliffed mountains miles in the distance. The utter absence of anything remotely hinting of civilization.

All that—when we'd been crossing the sparse woodland pasture of a southern county before the lightning had struck!

Rusty's choked words formed the first coherent sentence.

"Listen," he grated hoarsely, "this ain't Georgia!"

Leeds got the next sentence loose. "For once in my life, Rusty," he declared, "I agree with you perfectly!"

Nobody cracked wise.

Nobody felt like it. For this was screwy, frighteningly screwy. And all of a sudden there was a fine, cold sweat on my brow . . .

CHAPTER III

Centuries Into the Past

BY NOW the sticky sweetness of the lush, strange vegetation hemming in from the jungle all around us was strong in our nostrils. It was an eerie smell. Like a cheap brand of sugary incense.

And then we heard the bird.

At least it sounded like a bird. Not quite like any bird *I'd* ever heard, of course. It was too loud, too clear, too bloodthirsty a bird scream to suit me.

"Jeudas," Rusty muttered under his breath, "please don't let anybody try to tell me that was a crow!"

I gulped twice, and some instinct made me turn to Leeds for information. "Wh-where are we?" I managed.

Leeds shrugged. "I'll wait for the sixty-four dollar question."

Rusty suddenly rubbed his big jaw along his solid jaw, a shocked, white speculation on his face.

"Maybe," the redhead ventured, "we're," he had to gulp before he could get it out, "d-d-dead!"

I looked at the somehow unnice jungle growth around us, while the memory of the bloodthirsty bird scream still tingled in my ears.

"No," I decided, "this place isn't heaven."

"Wh-who said anything about heaven?" Rusty demanded.

Leeds had turned quietly away while Rusty and I were still rooted in our tracks. He was walking along the natural clearing in which we found ourselves, stopping now and then to glance down at the ground with a studious, unhurried scrutiny.

Rusty and I both noticed him at the same time.

"Who in the hell do you think you are?" Rusty demanded. "Daniel Boone, or the Lone Ranger?"

"I'm the little native boy out of Kipling's *Jungle Book*," Leeds said quietly. "And if you don't believe it," he pointed casually down at something in the soft earth at his feet, "take a look at this."

We were over beside him before the last word left his mouth, standing on either side of him, and looking down askance at the imprint in the soft earth where he pointed.

The imprint of an incredibly enormous animal foot; a print at least three feet in diameter!

In ninety-nine out of a hundred other situations, Rusty's remark would have been howlingly unoriginal. Now it was just unoriginal: "There ain't no such animal!" he gasped.

But Leeds didn't even hear him. He was staring straight ahead, a fixed, grim expression around the corners of his mouth. Staring through the tangled depths of the sickly sweet jungle growth directly ahead of us.

"What is it?" I gasped, startled again. "What do you see?"

Leeds spoke softly. "I don't see anything," he said. "I'm just trying to see what I can see." It didn't make sense, but I wasn't blaming anyone for not making sense at this moment.

"Look." I grabbed his arm sharply. "What do you make of this huge damned animal print?"

"Make of it?" Leeds blinked in surprise. "Make of it? Why, it's a dinosaur print, of course."

"A dinosaur?" I yelped, while the skin peeled icily down my spine. "A dinosaur?"

Leeds nodded. "That's right. Sorry. I thought you'd recognize it. Don't know why I expected you to do so. Sometimes I don't think beyond myself."

"What," Rusty put in, "is a dinersour?"

Leeds explained briefly. "They were extinct centuries ago," he concluded.

RUSTY nodded soberly. Then his face brightened. "But, hell, Leeds, this is easy. If them beasts were outta date hundreds of years back, then this *couldn't* be the print of a dinersour!" He beamed brightly at the stunning impact of his own logic.

Leeds nodded sober agreement. "Under ordinary circumstances I'd say you're right, Rusty," he said. "But can you find anything ordinary in these circumstances?" He waved his hand generally, to indicate our situation. "We're hit by a bolt of lightning while crossing a sparsely wooded section of farmland in Georgia," he went on. "Our tank is knocked about twenty feet through the air and lands right side up with no one killed. And when we climb out, we find that somehow we're god-knows-how-many miles from our location, surrounded by territory that couldn't be found in any section of Georgia that I know anything about. It's a cinch it's nowhere within a four hundred mile radius of the county where our divisional headquarters are. In fact," he said speculatively, "I'd be willing to bet there's no wasteland or jungle sections similar to this anywhere in the United States!"

Rusty rubbed his solid jaw with a big knuckled paw. "Yeah," he admitted. "The situation isn't exactly everyday, is it?"

I cut in. "In relation to your last guess, Leeds, where in the hell do you think we are, if it isn't in the U. S.?"

Leeds rubbed a hand across his forehead. "I have to try to figure this out a little, Burt," he said. "Hell, I don't know but what maybe we are still in the United States at that; maybe still in Georgia, even."

"But how could we still be in Georgia," I protested, waving a hand to indicate our surroundings, "when you say, and I agree also, that there isn't territory similar to this in the whole U. S.?"

"It's not easy to explain," Leeds admitted soberly. "But, then, neither is the dinosaur print, or how in the hell we got here to begin with."

"Yeah," I agreed slowly, "I see what you mean."

"Did you ever study geology or historic biology?" Leeds asked with what seemed to be almost casual irrelevance.

I shook my head. "No. Did you?"

"Messing around with odd angles of odd subjects has always been a sort of hobby of mine. Curious information about unimportant—so-called—angles to sciences has always fascinated me."

"Yeah," I nodded impatiently. "I've yet to see anything that hasn't fascinated you. But what's it add up to?"

This time Leeds seemed to reflect before answering immediately; as if he had information that would knock my hat off, but wanted to recheck it mentally for his own satisfaction before blurting it.

Rusty took this silence to shove himself back into the parley.

"All I wanta know," the redhead demanded, "is where we are."

"It's like this," Leeds suddenly said. "All this," he waved his hand to indicate the jungle surrounding us, "plant life and undergrowth is of the most primitive biological type. As far as civilized man knows, this sort of vegetation died out eons back in time. It exists nowhere on the face of the earth as we know it today."

My mind was starting to march around in narrowing little circles trying to follow this.

"Also, we've found the track of a species of evolutionary animal which hasn't existed on the face of the earth in centuries."

"Yeah," Rusty broke in, "a dinersour." He beamed, glad at the opportunity to air his newly found knowledge.

Leeds glanced wryly at him, then went on. "So what does all this point to more than anything else?"

"Huh?" I demanded. "Come again!"

"What one fact in all this big mess stands out most clearly?" Leeds demanded.

"That we don't know where we are," Rusty blurted before I could supply the answer.

Leeds shook his head. "No. The most outstanding thing about this incredibly strange situation and our surroundings is the fact that they couldn't exist—according to absolutely solid, modern scientific fact—in any place other than a world centuries and centuries back in time itself!"

I squinted hard at Leeds. "Sure you didn't hit your head when the lightning knocked the tank through the air?"

"When the lightning, through the presence of a most peculiar radio device, knocked our tank through time, you mean," Leeds corrected me soberly. "I'm not out of my head, Burt, and I'm not kidding. I'm no mental marvel, but what I do know about what we've seen all around us here adds up only to the conclusions I've just handed out."

"You mean," I demanded indignantly, "to stand there and tell me we're centuries back in the past?"

"I mean," Leeds said angrily, "that two and two makes four."

RUSTY, who had been following our interchange frowningly, brightened up when it came inside his mental sights. "That's right," he blurted happily. "Leeds is right, Burt. Two and two's four!"

We both fixed him with an impatient glare, and his effervescence subsided.

I turned back to face Leeds.

"Look," I said, "I have a man-on-the-street knowledge of so-called time theories and all that malarky. I know that a few zaney scientists subscribe to them and claim that some day time travel will be feasible. But as far as I'm concerned, that's a lot of junk. Please don't hand me any more of that back-in-the-past reasoning, Leeds. You're too smart for that sort of noise."

Leeds shrugged. "All right, Burt," he said with softly worded surrender, "you explain all this, then."

"Why, it's simple," I said. "This is

just, ah, weelll, I mean, that is. Hell, Leeds, dammit all. This is, ahhh . . ."

But he had me. As coldly and as simply as that. One sentence was all Leeds had to use in the clinch. And it had punctured any balloons of doubt I might have clung to.

Leeds smiled humorlessly.

"But, Leeds," I began weakly.

And the shot blasted out at that moment, loudly, startlingly, less than two feet from us. We both wheeled to see Rusty, the huge automatic pistol he carried at his belt as a side arm, smoking in his big, red knuckled mitt.

We looked toward the spot where the barrel of the gun still pointed. A spot near a heavy fringe of thick jungle brush.

An incredible, miniature monster lay stretched out there kicking it's nine legs in last dying spasms!

"Damned thing looked dangerous," Rusty commented briefly to us over his shoulder. "Noticed it moving creepy-like through the brush toward us."

Neither Leeds nor I said a word. We moved cautiously over toward the dying creature as Rusty followed, nonchalantly smug over his marksmanship, at our heels.

Leeds held out an arm to halt us as we drew within five feet of the thing kicking there on the soft, black soiled grass near the fringe of the underbrush.

It was about seven feet long, about two feet thick, and maybe three wide. It most closely resembled a gigantic, mis-shapen, horned toad. Except that it seemed protected by a thick coat of shell-like armor, and had, as I said before, nine legs.

It was flat on its back, now, and those legs were making their last feeble kicks as we watched it wordlessly. Blood was pouring from the huge right eye where Rusty had plugged it.

AND then Leeds pointed his finger at a pair of sharp, thin tendrils that ran bug-like from its skull.

"Damned good thing Rusty plugged it," he said softly. "Those waspish tendrils are venomous stingers. Deadly poisonous, no doubt. We might easily have been attacked by it."

Rusty's chest puffed out.

"I seen that turtle armor around it and figgered I'd better not waste a shot on it, so I let 'em have it in the blinker," he declared.

I looked at the ugly creature and shuddered. The legs had stopped kicking, now, and I started in closer toward it. Leed's hand shot out and grabbed my arm.

"Let it be," he said. "Maybe it's dead, but maybe it isn't quite dead yet. Don't take chances."

I was glad to take his advice. We turned away and went back toward the tank in the middle of the narrow clearing.

None of us said a word. I felt certain we were all thinking pretty much the same thoughts, however. But I didn't count on Rusty's typically unorthodox reaction.

"Well," Rusty said brightly, "maybe we better get rolling again. I missed one date with a southern peach, and I got one lined up for tomorrow that I don't wanta miss."

I looked at Leeds, and he returned the glance with equal amazement, shaking his head unbelievingly.

I touched Rusty's arm.

"Look, chum," I said, "don't you get it?"

Rusty frowned. "Get what?"

"The spot we're in," I said. "Weren't you listening when Leeds and I threshed out an explanation of

where we really are?"

"Not carefully," Rusty admitted. "I just got the gist of it, and understood that you'd figgered out where we were. Why, are we a long ways from where we wanna be?"

We were patient, then. Oh, so very patient. We told it to Rusty slowly. We didn't use big words. We made it as simple as we could. We repeated it three times, each of us, into his none too shell-like ear. And then we stood back and waited for the great light to break out of his pan.

"Ohhhhhh," Rusty said soberly. "Then we're really in a jam, eh? We're really lost, huh? How long do you think it'll be before we can find our way out of this joint?"

Leeds and I sighed and exchanged glances of frustration. The swift trigger touch in Rusty Harrigan was limited to his finger. His mind didn't have any.

"We'll try again later and it'll seep in over a gradual period of time," I told Leeds.

He nodded agreement. "That's the best way." Then: "What do we do now?"

I looked at the sun lowering fast on the horizon. "It'll be dark pretty soon," I judged. "We have no idea of the territory around us, and scouting it by night, with such pretty denizens of the jungle as we just saw at large, would be a risky proposition. We'd better hole in here in this clearing around the tank. We can keep a brush fire going all night, stand watch tricks in turn, and keep any danger off that way."

Leeds nodded agreement. "That's the best program."

"You mean we gotta camp here?" Rusty demanded.

I nodded. "Exactly."

Rusty groaned. "Whatta dump, and whatta spot to be in!"

I thought of the night gathering over the primeval jungle, and of the huge, incredibly monstrous creatures stalking the darkness in search of food. I thought of the fact that we were thousands of years in the past, utterly lost and at the mercy of a million unknown elements. Something inside me grew cold and shuddered violently. But I managed a grin for Rusty and Leeds.

"That's the height of understatement," I said.

And as if in answer, the blood-hungry bird screech ripped shrilly, half-humanly, out of the jungle depths once more. This time I shuddered outwardly . . .

CHAPTER IV

The Neanderthals

WE BROKE out our emergency rations and started a small fire just about the time the sun went down. And as the three of us hunched around the blaze to cheat the growing dampish cold, the jungle began really to come alive with sound.

And the sounds weren't pretty, believe me.

They were the sounds of strange and hungry beasts waking from the slumber of a warm afternoon, stretching themselves in the growing cold and darkness before they began their forays for food.

Leeds felt the danger crackling increasingly loud through the atmosphere, and so did I. But the two of us could only envy the calm placidity with which Rusty accepted the situation. The fact that his almost bovine acceptance was due in a large part to an overwhelming ignorance of the real danger of our plight did little to alter the situation.

After that, pulling out cigarettes, we had a council of war and policy around the fire. Leeds and I, of course, carried on most of the war and shaped the policy.

Rations were the first thing slated for conservation. And an estimate of our supplies was immediately made. After that we figured them out, ounce for ounce, so that we'd get through the next six days on them. Even at that, however, they were stretched pretty thin.

Matches, clothing, medical aid and ammunition rounds were all in order, of course, for we knew our allotments in those items beforehand. However, they, too, were put on a strict rationing basis.

"We'll need 'em for hunting when we run out of food," said Leeds, speaking of bullets.

In his voice and his eyes, however, there was the unmistakable conclusion that we might damned well need our ammunition for sheer self-defense.

"Don't worry about me using more than my share," Rusty put in. "One shot to a target is plenty for old Rusty." Which, thank God, was a fact.

We decided, then, to match off the watch tricks in four hour shifts. I drew the first, from eight to midnight. Rusty was next, from twelve to four, and Leeds was then to take over until eight.

We checked over our equipment on the M-3, getting gear and guns in shape, and then, on my instructions, Rusty and Leeds bedded down inside the tank for some shut-eye.

I took my watch near the fire, a tommy gun nestling in my lap as insurance against any disturbance, and a blanket wrapped around my shoulders for warmth against the dampness of the night.

THE stars were out in all their glory, thousands of them, jamming the sky like I'd never seen them before. I speculated for a while about those twinkling dots, wondering how much changing they'd done from this moment in the past up until the twentieth century.

And after a while I began to catch glimpses of the tiny, bright beacons flashing at me from the fringes of the jungle surrounding our clearing. Animals, of course. Of what species I didn't dare imagine. I thought about the dinosaur track a lot, too. Don't think I was forgetting that. I made a mental prayer that the clearing in which we were spending the night wouldn't happen to be the ancient monster's boudoir.

The jungle sounds continued. The queerest, chillingest bunch of noises you've ever heard. Now and then my feathered chum back there in the tangled undergrowth would give out one of those shrill, bloodthirsty, half-humble screeches and set my spine tingling again. I wished to God that he'd go off in some tree and take a snooze.

I thought of a line from somebody's epic poem. You know the one.

"This is the forest primeval."

It didn't help much, thinking that way. But somehow I couldn't get it out of my head. For, if ever there was a forest primeval, this was it.

Of course there was a little bit of mental argument going on in my mind against what Leeds had said. Now that I was alone some of my skepticism returned. But every time it did, the clincher he'd given me, "Go ahead, Burt. You explain it," came back to reaffirm my faith in his theory. And what the hell, wasn't there that track, that print of the dinosaur? And I wasn't forgetting the miniature monster

with nine legs, the thing that looked like a nightmarish toad grown a hundred times in size.

Centuries back in the past. An unknown jungle, peopled by unknown monsters, stretching God knows how many thousand miles to every side of us.

It wasn't too pleasant to think about, so I turned my thoughts to nostalgic remembrances of the things we'd left thousands of years away from us. That wasn't any too helpful to personal morale either, and finally I went back to concentrating on the shadows and sounds and flickering eyes around the clearing where we were camped.

The time passed this way until at last it was close to midnight, and I was climbing to my feet, shedding the blanket, and preparing to rouse Rusty for relief.

He groaned a little, grumbling sleepily, but woke at last from my none too gentle tweaking of his ear.

"Huh," Rusty muttered. "Time for my trick?"

"You said it, child," I told him. I shoved the tommy gun into his big and very capable paws.

He stood there, rubbing the sleep from his eyes with the big red knuckles of his right mitt, while he held the tommy gun carelessly with his left.

"When do I wake Leeds?" Rusty demanded foggily.

I WAS already bedding myself down in the bunk Rusty had occupied. Leeds lay sound asleep a few feet away in a makeshift bunk of his own fashioning.

"Four hours," I told him, "and no sooner."

"Gimme your timepiece," Rusty demanded.

I removed my wristwatch and handed it to him. "Don't know how in the hell the band will fit that wrist of yours," I said. "Don't snap the thing."

Rusty held it to his ear, then grinned.

"Good to have this, huh?" he said. "I mean, out in the middle of nowhere, it's good to have something you can depend on."

"You sound like a magazine advertisement," I told him. "Get out there before the wolves eat our tank up."

"See any wolves?" Rusty said eagerly.

I made a face. "Go out and look. But don't stray from the fire, Red Hoodingride."

"Don't worry about me," Rusty advised, starting up and out the tower. "You guys'll never have a more peaceful sleep than you'll get now, with ole Rusty standing guard."

"That makes me feel better already," I said sarcastically.

Leeds sat up then, blinking and cursing softly under his breath.

"Can't you guys hold your oratorical conventions some place other than the one spot where I'm trying to grab some sleep?" he demanded.

Rusty poked his head down from the tower to ask, "Did I wake yuh, Leeds?"

Leeds glared helplessly up at him.

"No," he answered with acid calm. "No, Rusty. You didn't wake me. I always wake up automatically at midnight just to see what time it is."

Rusty frowned. "Really? What a hellofa silly thing to do." His head disappeared. Then it poked back into the tank again. "Say, what time is it?" he demanded.

I sighed. "You've got my watch," I told him. "When you get to your guard post figure it out on your toes."

Rusty muttered something, and his red head disappeared from the tower opening. We heard him clambering down the tankside a moment later.

"Sorry, Leeds," I muttered.

"S'all right," he muttered. "Don't know how I'd get along sleeping normally, anyway."

There was a silence, and I closed my eyes in the darkness, feeling suddenly tired as hell. I pulled the blanket up over my shoulders and stretched as best I could in the cramped surroundings.

"Leeds," I said after a moment.

"Yeah?" his voice answered sleepily through the darkness.

"How damned many species of animal life do you think there'll be around this neck of time?"

There was another silence for a moment. "Hell," Leeds answered. "I really don't know, Burt. Plenty of 'em. You can be sure of that. I don't think the scientists have ever made any accurate computations."

"This would be a helluva swell spot for a scientist," I thought aloud, "if he could ever get back."

"Yeah," said Leeds, "if he could ever get back."

Another silence.

"That brings up something I haven't wanted to talk about," I said after a minute or so.

"You mean about getting back, of course," Leeds answered.

"Yeah," I admitted. "Think we've any chance, ever?"

This was the longest silence. And when Leeds' voice finally came through the darkness, it was grimly soft. "What do you think, Burt?"

"I don't see how—" I began.

Leeds cut me off. "Neither do I," he agreed.

We didn't say any more after that. Pretty soon I could hear Leeds' breathing coming regularly in sleep, and I lay there in the darkness envying him, his composure, and wondering how in the hell all this came about and where in the hell it would end.

I must have dropped off to sleep on that track . . .

A HAND was shaking my shoulder roughly, and I said something nasty in my sleep, turning over, then sitting up, blinking and rubbing my eyes.

"Damnit to hell!" I muttered. "This is no time to jar me out of the only decent rest I've had since—"

And by then my eyes were focusing. My eyes were focusing to the extent where I was aware of several unpleasant circumstances all at once. The first being that the interior of the tank was weirdly illuminated. Illuminated by a torch held in a gigantic, hairy hand. The second was the animal stench, the unwashed, wild and woolly odor in the air. And the third was the fact that there were two alien *human* beings standing over me. One of them was the owner of the hairy hand that held the torch. The other, the owner of the equally hairy paw that grabbed my shoulder so roughly. This latter person having, rather than a torch, a huge, ominous, crude club!

"What the—" I started.

But my exclamation was never completed. One of those hairy paws clamped hard across my mouth, and an arm, massively muscled, coiled tightly around my chest, pinioning me helplessly.

I was lifted off my feet, then, and carried bodily from my improvised bunk. Up through the tower, while the torchlight carrier behind me grunted in the background.

Then we were out in the clearing, and I was dumped to the ground. Rusty was there. Flat on his back, hands and arms tied by crude thongs of leather. He was out cold, a lump the size of an egg already swelling on the side of his skull.

I got a better view of our captors, now, both of them.

They were even larger than I had supposed inside the tank.

Huge, massively boned and hairy creatures. Both wore animal skins, Johnny Weismuller fashion, to cover their tremendous bodies. Their skulls were the kind you see on stone-age creatures in museum reproduction cases.

I wondered then, where in the hell Leeds McAndrews had gone. Foggily, I tried to recall whether or not he'd been in the tank when I was jarred out of my sleep by the ungentle gents who now grunted unintelligibly to one another over my prostrate form. I couldn't remember. But it seemed safe to assume that had he been so, he'd be out here in the clearing, captive with Rusty and me.

Starting to rise to my feet, I saw the slight movement made by the club carrying behemoth to my right. I changed my mind hastily, thinking of the lump on Rusty's skull, and went back to my former position.

Bitterly, I remembered the fears I'd held for the animal life around us. It seems I'd never given a thought to cave men.

The Neanderthalish chap with the club made a grunting noise that might have been some communication to his other chum. For the torch-bearing chappie nodded his assent and stepped around behind me.

Warily, I turned, looking back over my shoulder. Turned, to see the torch-bearer's extremely ugly pan split in what was undoubtedly meant to be a grin.

And then I got it.

Hard against the side of my skull, while a million flames exploded in my brain and the stars came out shooting like Roman candles to a pinwheel background of wheeling planets.

The club-bearing brute had used the weapon the moment I'd turned. And as I fell through a million miles of flame splashed darkness, I was fuzzily aware of this fact. And fuzzily aware, too, that I couldn't hang onto my last straws of consciousness any longer . . .

CHAPTER V

A Prehistoric Greeting

FOR lord knows how long, I was certain that I'd been taken to hell. Taken to hell and placed upon a huge spit—like a barbecued chicken—which was driven through the top of my skull and straight through the rest of my body.

The spit was turning me back and forth across a huge furnace of white hot coals, toasting and crisping my body to a delicious golden brown, while savages, all of them looking like cave men, stood happily around the pit on which I was being fried, spittle drooling eagerly from the sides of their huge mouths.

And then I opened my eyes. Opened my eyes to find immediately the physical causes for the nightmare in which I'd been living.

I was stretched out, tied hand and foot, before a huge, roaring bonfire in front of the mouth of a great cave. Close enough to the fire, in fact, to dangerously approximate being spitted over white hot coals.

My back, legs, and forehead were drenched with sweat from the heat of the great blaze. And the aching in my head from the smashing blow I'd received from the primitive war club was undoubtedly the reason for my imagining that a spit had been driven through my skull.

And as for the cave savages, my nightmare had batted one thousand.

They were everywhere around the big blaze, and streamed back and forth before the mouth of the huge cave.

None of them seemed to be paying the slightest attention to the trussed form of yours truly; so I squirmed this way and that, until I was able to get a better view of the primitive panorama around me.

My eyes must have been bug-wide, and it's a cinch that my heart was hammering sledge-like in my chest as I lay there on my side, taking a long visual gulp of it all.

There were crudely fashioned ladders running along the walls on either side of the big cave entrance, and by craning my neck until it almost snapped, I was able to see smaller cave openings, perhaps a double dozen of them, at the end of each of those crude ladders.

It was evident that this location was the primeval equivalent of a Park Avenue apartment sector. I got the impression that it was close to a cliff edge, and the additional feeling that there was probably quite a drop down from said cliff edge. It seemed reasonable to assume that for protection's sake this community was built on a mountainside.

And as much as I hated to admit it—for my own peace of mind—the citizenry of this community seemed far cruder than the dwellings they'd fashioned for their ape-like bodies.

The two chaps who'd captured Rusty and me had evidently been just average specimens of this pre-civilized humanity. For there were guys, and gals, moving around the place who were considerably more gargantuan than our original captors.

And the female of the species was repulsive beyond my wildest dreams. I thought I'd seen ugly wenches, but these walked away with last prize for all time as far as I was concerned.

They were all almost as large as their menfolk, and aside from being lumpier generally, if you know what I mean, they were hard to tell from the males.

I had a sudden, wild, foolish nostalgia for the beautiful gals of Georgia. And then I remembered that these, ironically enough, might very well be Georgia peaches of the ummmm-thousand B. C. variety.

It occurred to me, then, that I'd better squint around a bit to see what had happened to Rusty.

Some more squirming around on the earth brought me into the desired position for additional look-see of the territory.

It took me several minutes to scan the territory thoroughly enough to establish the fact that Rusty Harrigan wasn't in evidence.

And then it took an additional two minutes for me to comprehend fully what a hell of a spot I was in.

LEEDS had been the first to disappear. I hadn't thought about that since I'd been banged over the bean by the knotty club. But now I gave it some more very serious consideration.

I wondered, among other things, if our cavemen captors had beaten his brains out while he slept. I hadn't thought to see if he, or the remains of him, had been in the tank at the time that the massively muscled brethren had dragged me from the interior of the tank. There hadn't been time for that.

But, too, there had been no sign of him around the clearing when I'd discovered Rusty, out cold and tied like a hog for market, immediately before I'd been sandbagged with an ancient shillallah.

I remembered that Leeds had always been a light sleeper.

Perhaps, on hearing the sound of the scuffle that must have occurred between Rusty and the cave dweller, Leeds had piled out of the tank to see what was going on.

Perhaps he'd even engaged in the scrap alongside Rusty, maybe getting his brains beaten out in the fringes of the jungle.

I shuddered, giving up the mental debate.

But Rusty, where was he now? Had he been more than out cold there in the clearing when I'd spied him with the knot on his knob? It didn't seem likely and I quite frankly hoped to God their club belts hadn't killed him.

Remembering the thickness of that Mick's skull, however, I heaved a sigh of relief and dismissed the thought. It would be utterly impossible for anyone to kill Rusty Harrigan by beating his brains out.

And then it suddenly occurred to me that the redhead must have been stealthily ambushed. For had he seen the two aboriginals advancing on our camp clearing, they'd never have survived two quick bursts from his tommy gun. Rusty Harrigan had the sharpest eye in the service, and the fastest trigger finger. An eye like an eagle—I remembered someone having commented. Then I grinned, recalling Leeds' additional bird-like description of Rusty. And a brain like a wren—Leeds had added.

But eagle eye and wren brain notwithstanding, Rusty was nowhere around at present. And the most disconcerting factor I faced in an entire hodge-podge of impossible trouble was the fact that I now didn't know whether Rusty or Leeds were alive any longer.

So I lay there near the roaring blaze, baking and broiling until my clothes were sticking fast to my body and my face must have been blood red. Lay there and went through a special sort of indescribable torment. Torment which brought into play all my emotions of dread, horrible suspense, futile remorse, and sick fear regarding the fate of the two best guys I'd ever known.

And finally, I don't know how much later it was, I caught sight of thick legs and huge feet moving over toward me. I closed my eyes instinctively as I heard the guttural grunts passed between my approaching captors.

Hands were grabbing me up, then, like a limp sack of flour, and I found myself tossed up onto a broad, unpleasantly odorous, bare shoulder.

Then my insides were getting an unpleasant jolting, while I caught bobbing glimpses of the ground over which I was being carried. Suddenly the ground became stone, and I realized we were entering the large cave which I'd first seen on opening my eyes.

The place seemed illuminated flickeringly in some sort, and I decided it was probably lighted by torches placed along the walls.

We—my carrier and I—must have covered about fifty or sixty yards of caveway before we came to a halt.

I was just wondering what next, when I was dumped jarringly to the stone flooring, narrowly missing landing on my skull.

I was twisting around wildly on the floor, trying to get my snoot off the cold stone, a most difficult maneuver when bound hand and foot, when hands were once again laid most ungently on my carcass and a stone knife cut the thongs binding my aching ankles.

THIS, to date, came as the greatest surprise of my captivity. I lay

there motionless, face downward, feeling that my legs were now free, but dreading to take advantage of the new freedom for fear of some unsubtle trickery.

A huge hand slapped me on the back —an unmistakable signal for me to rise to my feet.

But I didn't move. I didn't turn my face for a gander at the backslapper. I'd turned my noggin once, and gotten a club in the side of the skull for my curiosity.

I could hear grunt-sounds. They sounded slightly annoyed and a little bit disgusted. Probably because I wasn't rising so I could be kicked in the stomach and knocked down again, I figured.

All of a sudden, for no particular reason that hadn't been present all along, I got boiling mad.

I pulled my knees up under me—my arms were still bound by thongs behind my back—and tried the grimly precarious balancing feat of rising. Try to get up without support sometime when your arms are securely tied behind your back.

The first effort wasn't successful, and wasn't funny. I got but several feet from the floor before I spilled over on my face.

There were grunt-noises around me this time that sounded like good, hearty, primeval horselaughs.

I was beginning to turn my slow burn into a boiling rage. And the next try I spread my legs as wide as I could, one in front of me, the other behind. It did the trick.

And as I was on my feet, a hearty paw slammed me hard in the back, while a most familiar voice boomed out jovially.

"Hy-yah, Sarge!"

The voice belonged to Rusty Harrigan!

CHAPTER VI

Enter, a Queen

I WHIRLED around to face him like a dervish showing off, half my brain digesting the sound of that voice, and the other half refusing to believe it.

But it was Rusty, all right. Rusty still with a lump on his skull, and blood caked in those crimson locks of his. But Rusty in spite of hell and high tide.

I was too stunned to say anything immediately. I could only stare at him like a blasted idiot, trying to shift my mental gears to a combination that would handle this impossibility.

For Rusty looked completely unperturbed, utterly at ease, and very much amused with the antics through which I'd been putting myself in the past two or three minutes.

"What," I croaked at last, "what in the hell is this all about?"

Rusty's grin didn't leave. He continued to stare smugly at me. And his self-satisfaction oozed from the tenor of his voice.

"Don't worry about a thing, Burt old boy. Rusty Harrigan of the U. S. Armored Forces is in complete control."

And then I noticed for the first time what sort of a place this cave we were in was; and what sort of companions stood all around us.

The cave was an extraordinarily high vaulted affair, and was some twenty or twenty-five yards wide. Looking back over Rusty's shoulder, I could see the entrance through which I'd been taken into the place. I could see the big, roaring fire still crackling down there at the mouth of it. As I'd originally suspected, huge, c r u d e torches were placed all along the walls

to provide the illumination for the cavern.

And gathered around us, all standing a few respectful yards back from Rusty, were at least two dozen aboriginals of the type I now am getting heartily sick of.

Rusty saw my glance, and waved a genial hand at our crude chums and cavern surroundings. He spoke with the air of a greeter presenting the keys to a city.

"Some joint, eh?" he said.

I nodded. "Yeah, and some playmates." I paused to get mad all over again in exactly half a second. "Listen," I thundered, "I want to know what in the hell this is all about! I want you to start at the beginning and bring me right up to this minute, chum. I want a blow by blow accounting!"

Rusty grinned more broadly. "Sure, sure, if you'll wait a minute while I have your wrist thongs cut." He turned, making a cutting gesture with one hand over his right wrist. One of the aboriginals grunted, nodded, and stepped over to me with a stone knife in his hand.

I turned my back and the thongs were sawed through speedily by the razor-sharp edge of the stone.

The aboriginal stepped quickly back to a respectful distance behind Rusty.

"Now," I demanded, rubbing my very sore wrists, "get on with it."

"Very simple," Rusty said. "These babies, musta been a good dozen of 'em, crept up on me while I was standing my watch trick. I never knew what hit me. Guess they beaned me with one of them clubs they carry."

I interrupted him. "For your information there wasn't a dozen of them, Rusty. There were only two. And you must have been plenty alert to let them 'creep' up on you."

Rusty colored, and the smug smirk left his face for a minute.

"Maybe so," he conceded. "I wouldn't know how many there was. Maybe there was thirty."

"There were only two," I repeated.

"Anyhow," said Rusty, "I was ambushed. They jumped down on me from them trees and—" suddenly he stopped, really flushing this time, as he realized his slip.

"Ahhh," I said icily, "down from the trees, eh? I didn't know there were any trees in our clearing. You couldn't have gone just a little bit into the jungle to snoop around, could you, Rusty?"

RUSTY looked stricken. "Hell, just thought I'd try a little hunting, Burt. I was keeping my eye on our camp-site alla time, of course, and—"

"Of course," I said frigidly. "Sure. You were standing your watch duty and hunting, too. One eye for each."

"Do you wanta know what happened or don't you?" Rusty demanded, mopping his brow with his sleeve.

"Sure," I said. "Sure, I want to know. And it seems I'm finding out a lot."

"Well," Rusty put in hastily, "it was like I said. Bam, I was knocked out like a light. Then I didn't know no more until I come to in this cave here," he waved his hand. "I wasn't tied up at all. I was just stretched out flat, and some dame was rubbing my forehead gentle-like, bringing me around."

"Some dame?" I demanded.

"Yeah," Rusty said. "Wearing one of them skins they all wear around here, only she had an extra skin." He said the last words in disappointment.

"You mean one of the gruesome, hairy old bags, beef-fisted Amazons they have here?" I demanded incredulously.

Rusty echoed my surprise. "Old

bags?" Rusty demanded. "I ain't seen any old muscle bound bags around here. This here dame I'm telling you about was the only woman I've seen so far."

I spied an aboriginal female in the crowd of flat-heads behind Rusty and pointed to one.

"What do you think she is," I demanded, "a he?"

Rusty's eyes followed my pointing finger. He gulped.

"You mean," he choked, "that the bulgier brutes around here is women, actually?"

"Elemental, my dear Rusty," I said acidly.

The wench at whom I'd pointed bared thick lips in a gruesomely coy smile, and I shuddered, turning back to Rusty.

"You mean to say it wasn't a dame of that type who was stroking your fevered brow when you regained consciousness?" I demanded.

Rusty raised his r i g h t hand. "Honest to God, Burt. This wench I tell you about was a looker, a queen!"

I shook my head pityingly. "You must have been delirious," I scoffed.

"Honest!" Rusty protested.

I frowned. "You certain?" I demanded.

"I'm getting to the point I wanta tell you," Rusty answered. "This dame, this queen-bee, this looker, seemed to be the Boss over all these flat-skulled apes around here."

"They aren't apes," I said. "They're primitives, aboriginals."

"Anyway," Rusty declared, "they look like apes." Rusty had a one-track mind. "And this dame was their Boss, what I mean."

"But why weren't you tied up?" I demanded. "Especially since they took the trouble to knock you out and tie you up in the first place?"

Rusty spread his hands wide. "That's what I'm getting at," he said plaintively. "Doncha see what I mean? The dame fell for me like a load of bricks!"

I could only stand there and gape at the egocentric redheaded mug. Gape, and shake my head slowly from side to side.

"And so that's why you're up and around," I said. "And is that why I've been freed?"

"Why else?" demanded Rusty. "These baboons," he waved his hand to indicate the aboriginals who gaped curiously at us, "were told off by the knockout babe when they tried to push me around. They're scared as hell of her, and have been plenty nice to me, ever since she showed 'em that she wanted nothing but the best for Rusty Harrigan."

Everything was coming too fast and furious now for anything to register definitely. I put a hand to my forehead, and held another up to Rusty to quiet him a few minutes.

MAYBE Rusty hadn't been delirious. Maybe everything he'd just told me was true. Certainly, the aboriginals around us were definitely no longer hostile. Certainly, too, Rusty's explanation was as reasonable as anything else that had happened in the last fifteen hours or so.

"Where in the hell is Leeds?" I demanded, switching the tack.

Rusty looked blank. "Isn't he out there, tied up somewhere like you?" he demanded.

I shook my head. And then, briefly, I told him all I knew about what might have happened to Leeds.

Rusty gulped. "Jeeudas," he muttered. "When they brought you in, I felt sure as hell they'd been bringing Leeds in here pretty soon after."

"Unless," I said grimly, "his brains were bashed out in the tank."

Rusty looked sick. He gulped again, as if fighting for breath that had been knocked from him.

"I know what you're thinking, Burt," he said quietly. "If I hadnta been such a damned fool—if I hadn't gone prowling around looking for something to shoot at, none of us would be in this place, and Leeds would be al—" he choked off, unable to finish.

I jarred his shoulder sharply with my palm, and there was a mumbling grunt of interest from the primitives massed behind Rusty.

"Take it easy, redhead," I ordered. "We don't know that Leeds is done for. I've a hunch he's still very much alive somewhere. And, besides, we don't know if this situation is good or bad, yet. Tell me more about the beautiful dame in the animal skins."

Rusty shrugged. "That's about all I know," he said.

"All? Where is she? Where did she go?" I demanded.

Rusty spread his hands, he pointed over my shoulder, then.

I turned, looking at the end of the cave to which he pointed for the first time. I'd been facing in that direction when I'd scrambled to my feet, but I hadn't even noticed it when Rusty's voice had boomed in my ear so suddenly.

Now I got my first clear view of the rock-hewn throne dais.

For it was a throne. It couldn't have been anything else. Primitive, crude, yet nakedly majestic, it towered about six feet from the stone base of the dais.

And yet it was small. Small, that is, compared to the size it would have had to be to fit comfortably any creature of the oversized bulk of the aboriginals.

Gaudy colored feather plumage was the crest which haloed the peak behind the throne chair itself, and rich fur skins formed a thick carpet all around the dais.

There was, however, no one occupying the throne at the moment.

I saw the side exit, a cave mouth leading to a smaller cavern corridor, toward which Rusty was now pointing.

"She went out there?" I demanded.

Rusty nodded.

I started forward, and Rusty grabbed my arm just as an ominous snarling mutter rose from the aboriginals behind us.

"Not so fast," Rusty exclaimed. "Getting too close to that throne business is something these baboons don't seem to like—I know," he concluded, explaining, "I started to follow her."

I shrugged. "Okay. We'll oblige," I said.

Rusty's hand had suddenly tightened roughly on my arm, and he drew in his breath sharply.

"Look!" he said hoarsely. "There she is!"

But it wouldn't have been necessary for him to have said a word. For the incredibly gorgeous female creature who had just stepped onto the dais at the end of the cave announced her entrance by the very electrifying savage splendor of her presence!

CHAPTER VII

Ordered to Kill

EVEN the primitives behind us seemed to be holding the breath in their wide nostrils. And for some reason beyond explanation, my heart was beating at three times its normal quota.

The girl—her very suppleness and grace of action, not to mention her slender, beautifully molded body,

proclaimed her as a girl—moved across the dais with such serene assurance, that it was fully half a minute before I was aware she had ascended the steps to the throne chair and was now seated regally there.

"That," choked Rusty, "is the broad!"

But even his Main and Broadway remark couldn't break the spell that had suddenly taken hold of the cave and everyone in it including yours truly.

My jaw must have been fully an inch slack, my eyes ready to be knocked off by sticks.

And then I saw that she was crooking a delicate finger at Rusty and me, beckoning us toward her throne, smilingly.

Somehow my legs found locomotion, and I was but vaguely aware that Rusty moved along beside me as we advanced toward the stone dais and the throne in which the regally savage beauty sat.

I was able to see her face more clearly as we drew closer. The color of her hair, which from a distance had seemed to be burnished copper, now appeared to be rich gold.

Her lips were ripe, and red, and sensuously full. Half-parted as they were in an inscrutable smile, they took on still richer crimson from the milk white purity of her even teeth. Those lips moved then, making sounds that were her words.

But the sounds were nothing like the guttural gratings I'd heard from the thick lips of the flat-headed savages behind us. They were soft and *purring*. God knows I had no manner of telling what those sounds meant, but nonetheless, you could almost subconsciously *sense* their meaning.

Her eyes were luminously commanding, twin ovals of flashing brown passion; her cheekbones high, and ivory cheeks delicately tinted crimson in the almost imperceptible hollows.

And then I was half stumbling on the first steps leading to the dais. Half-stumbling, unaware of anything save the incredible fascination of the girl in the throne chair.

She raised her hand high, then, and I found myself — without thinking — dropping to my knees some five feet before the steps that led to her chair. I remember noticing Rusty imitating my obeisance, his features also transfixed in fascination on the girl.

She dropped her hand, then, and the inscrutable smile left her features. A moment later, and she raised her hand ever so slightly, palm upward. I found myself rising. Rusty similarly climbing to his feet again.

The girl turned her head briefly toward the side corridor from which she had made her entrance. Then she looked down at us again, the smile returning to her incredibly beautiful face.

And from the side corridor there suddenly entered a visibly frightened aboriginal. He looked like one of the two cave creatures who had captured us in the clearing, but I couldn't be certain.

And then, in utter amazement, I stared at what he was carrying in his thick arms.

A pair of tommy guns from the tank!

"Jeeudas!" Rusty exclaimed. "What in the—"

But the *purring* sounds made by the girl's voice then cut him off. She spoke to the terrified primitive, who advanced to within three feet of us, deposited the weapons, and backed frightenedly out of the picture.

I stared at the tommy guns, grateful for the link they'd established with

reality. There seemed suddenly to be less commanding fascination in the presence of the girl on the throne dais. It was as if, symbolically, those weapons had taken us, mentally at least, thousands of years up through the future, back into the time era to which we belonged.

I licked lips gone suddenly dry, thinking how grateful I'd have been for the presence of those guns when the aboriginals had captured me sleeping in the tank.

THEN I found my glance returning to the beautiful features of the girl, and found myself wondering if she knew the power that lay in those strangely shaped clubs three feet from us. It occurred to me, instantly, as if somehow she had mentally answered my question, that she did know; that perhaps Leeds, Rusty, and I had been watched by hidden eyes not many hours before, when Rusty had brought down the weird, nine-legged, giant frog at the fringe of the clearing. Perhaps *her* eyes too had seen Rusty's shooting.

She smiled, as if at me, and waved her hand toward the tommy guns in a gesture that could only mean, "Get them."

I stepped over to the guns, picked them up, turned and handed one to Rusty, who had been right behind me.

"What the hell is this all about?" Rusty muttered.

I shrugged, fondling the gun in my hands.

"I don't know," I said. "But I've got a temptation to use these."

Rusty was shocked. "You wouldn't!" he protested.

"I have a hunch that tells me it'd be a smart thing to do. Right this minute," I concluded.

"On the girl?" Rusty gasped.

I shrugged again, trying to keep my glance from returning to those incredibly beautiful features.

"Why not?" I demanded.

"Why, why she saved us from them baboons!" Rusty protested again.

"For what reason?"

Rusty took his turn at shrugging. "Maybe because we're like her more'n we're like these baboons."

"There's no more than a standard clip of ammunition with either of these guns," I reminded Rusty. "Did it ever occur to you that she's trusted us with 'em because she knows we could only kill a few dozen flat-heads before we'd be through?"

Rusty thought this over. Then he glanced up at the girl on the throne. She was still smiling. She held out her hand, as if it had a pistol in it, and pointed it at the stone wall of the cave to her right. I knew, then, that she *had* watched while Rusty brought down the strange frog-like monster not so many hours ago.

"She wants us to try these things," Rusty gasped.

"On the wall," I agreed. "Can you find a target there?"

Rusty squinted. "There's a little, round hollow about six feet up from the floor," he finally announced. "It's about three inches in diameter. See it?"

I strained my eyes for a minute. "Yeah," I said finally.

"I'll make it about six inches in diameter," Rusty announced calmly.

"At this distance?" I protested.

Rusty grinned, raising the tommy gun to firing position. He lined his sights briefly, then triggered the gun in a short, staccato burst which reverberated in the cave like cannon fire.

The aboriginals shrank back in awe. And glancing swiftly at the girl on the throne chair I saw that she was still smiling. From her very expression I

could tell that she knew the target Rusty had selected, and had a pretty good idea of what he'd boasted he could do to it.

"Take a look," Rusty told me.

I crossed over to the wall, finding the hollow Rusty had selected as his target. It was almost exactly six inches in diameter, now, and deeper than before!

I didn't have to look further to see that not a single bullet had scarred the smooth wall surface anywhere but in the exact center of Rusty's target.

"As called?" Rusty asked.

I nodded. "As called."

Returning to Rusty's side I had another chance to study the expression of the incredibly beautiful girl on the throne chair. Her smile was even more delighted, now, and her eyes glowed with satisfaction.

"You've pleased Her Majesty, at any rate," I told Rusty.

"But what's the pitch?" Rusty demanded. "Why did she order this exhibition?"

UNABLE to answer him, I glanced again at the girl on the throne chair. The smile had left her face, and her sensuously full red lips were now fixed in what seemed to be savage anticipation. She was looking past us, down toward the mouth of the cave, where we could hear sudden sounds of commotion.

Rusty and I turned in that direction immediately. The aboriginals between the throne dais and the cave mouth were parting in an avenue down which four of their compatriots dragged two inert, bound bodies.

"I'm beginning to get an idea, Rusty," I whispered quickly. "I think lovely golden locks on the throne intends to make us into a two man execution squad."

The four aboriginals dragging their two captives were drawing closer now. Closer, so that it was possible, now, to make something of the appearance of their captives.

And suddenly I gasped.

For one of those bound captives was Leeds McAndrews!

Rusty saw as much at the same moment I did. He grabbed my arm.

"Good god, Burt!" he choked.

"Take it easy," I warned him through set teeth. "We've got these tommy guns in our hands yet. Let's see what's what."

And then the Neanderthal men were dragging Leeds and the other trussed body past us and up to within two feet of the throne on which the girl sat.

Leeds was out cold, body limp in the thongs that bound him, shirt and coveralls torn, head cut from cheek to temple.

And then I noticed the other captive. Noticed and sucked in my breath in sharp surprise. For the bound victim besides Leeds McAndrews was not another shaggy Neanderthal, even though he was clad in typical loin skin attire and his black hair was matted and shaggy.

"Look at that other guy," Rusty whispered. "He ain't no baboon. Even if he's dressed like one!"

I was trying to figure out this new and very rapid twist to things. Who was the blackhaired young guy in the loin cloth? Had he been captured simultaneously with Leeds, or was he just a captive they'd had around here on ice somewhere?

It was apparent, now, that all the peoples of this past civilization weren't the thick, aboriginal swine that we had first encountered and who now were the majority crowding this cave. The entrance of the sensuously beautiful girl on the throne chair had been the

first indication of that. And now the appearance of another less primeval species of human being added confirmation to my first guess.

The girl was speaking now, *purring* of course. But there was a savage venom in the sound words she directed at the four primeval apes who stood over the captives they'd just dragged in before her.

The four turned then, frightenedly, and left the dais with stumbling haste. And then the girl's gaze was fixed on Rusty and me.

She held out her hand, pointing with one slim finger to the two captives at her feet. She *purred* something between set, milk white teeth.

I shuddered, sensing the meaning of the sounds she *purred*. A most unwholesome meaning. A meaning confirming my suspicions the moment I'd seen the aboriginals dragging the captives in through the mouth of the cave.

And then her slim finger was pointing commandingly at the tommy guns Rusty and I had in our hands. There was no mistaking that silent command. It said, *"Kill these two!"*

CHAPTER VIII

Into the Jaws of Death

EVEN Rusty got the implication of that commanding gesture.

"Burt," he gulped, grabbing my arm, "do you think she means what I think she means?"

I nodded, unable to answer that one lightly.

"What the hell," Rusty muttered grimly, "she's off her trolley."

"Take it easy," I warned him. "Don't lose your head. Sit tight."

I moved over to where Leeds McAndrews and the blackhaired young guy in the loin cloth lay. Bending over Leeds, I grabbed him by the hair and jerked his head back so that I could look into his face.

Looking up swiftly at the girl on the throne, I saw that her expression was one of puzzled watchfulness. I let Leeds' head drop back carelessly, registering an expression of as fierce contempt as I could command.

Another glance at the girl left me in doubt as to how the act was going. But I'd started this thing, and there wouldn't be any sense in dropping the scheme now. Unless she got wise.

I dropped to one knee beside Leeds, looking up for an instant to flash a warning glance at Rusty, who still stood frowningly where I'd left him.

Rusty seemed to catch the signal well enough, so I brought back my right hand in an open palmed arc, swinging it down hard on Leeds' cheek. It shook him. Shook him hard. But his eyelids only flickered. I registered another contemptuous glance for the benefit of the savage beauty on the throne. From the corner of my eye, I could see the trace of a satisfied smile forming on her sensuous lips.

I took a deep breath. I didn't like doing this. But it was the only way I could bring Leeds around without rousing suspicion. And he had to be conscious and on his feet, if we were to get any decent chance at a getaway.

Another open palmed slap, hard. It brought the blood flushing to his cheeks, and this time his eyes blinked more rapidly, stayed open half a second, unfocused, then closed once more.

I followed it with a third slap, stinging, brutal.

It did the trick.

Leeds McAndrews opened his eyes, looking bewilderedly and unbelievingly about him.

"Burt," he croaked. "Good god, Burt!"

"Easy," I said harshly. "I hate your guts, understand? For the benefit of the damsel up on that rocky throne chair I hate you enough to want to wake you up before I kill you. Get it?"

I made those words extremely snarly, and added appropriate facial expressions. For the benefit of the bloodthirsty and beautiful savage wench on the throne, of course.

Leeds McAndrews reacted magnificently. Dazed and shaken though he was; bewildered as he might have been concerning all this, he put an instant register of fright on his features.

"Yeah," he said in the tone of a stool pigeon sweating under a police beating. "Yeah, yeah, I get it. You scare the hell out of me. What's up?" He contorted his features fearfully.

"Little cutie pants on the throne wants us to rub you and the young strong man with you. Just to show how well our tommies work," I said wrathfully.

Leeds forced another frightened expression. "It fits in, Burt," he bleated in well-feigned terror. "It fits in perfectly. This dame on the throne is a female Hitler, Neanderthal style. She's a renegade from the primitive tribe that I stumbled on trying to find you lads. A tribe much more advanced than these Neanderthal ape-men with whom she's trying to start a blood-rule. This young Tarzan beside me is a member of the tribe that threw her out. We were caught by a raiding party of your female Hitler's bunch."

I got a swift glimpse of the girl on the throne from the corner of my eye. Her satisfaction was beginning to wane a bit, and I sensed that our act was losing punch. I slapped Leeds hard across the face and stood up.

"Help me drag these two over against the wall," I yelled at Rusty.

Rusty had heard it all, and his eyes were bugging. But he did his best to look savagely delighted as he moved over beside me.

"Take the blackhaired kid, Rusty," I told him. "Slap him into life. He'll have to be awake and on his feet, same as Leeds."

Rusty stepped between Leeds and the blackhaired young savage in the loin cloth, bending over and letting the latter have one hard across the mouth. I had time to notice that it brought Leeds' fellow captive around immediately. Then I had to busy myself dragging Leeds across to the cave wall.

I made it laborious going, and as I did so, loosened the thongs that were knotted around Leed's wrists.

"That'll leave your hands free to get to work on your leg bonds," I muttered.

"Good boy," Leeds said, and he made it sound like a whimper.

I could see Rusty doing the same stalling with the loin-clothed young savage. Then we were both propping Leeds and the long maned kid up against the wall.

WE TURNED, then, and went back to the place where we'd left the tommy guns.

"What in the hell now?" Rusty muttered as we bent to retrieve the weapons.

I gulped. "Give me a minute to think," I said. "I haven't got it all clear yet. There isn't enough ammunition to blast our way out of here through all those thick skulls. And that leaves just one other solution."

"Jeudas, be fast with it," Rusty muttered. Sweat was dripping down the redhead's forehead.

"You cover up for Leeds and the junior Tarzan," I said. "Keep the apes at bay. I'll handle the girl. She'll

have to be a hostage."

I turned from Rusty, then, and advanced toward the throne chair where the girl was seated. I put on my Sunday smile, and hoped to God that the old Main Street charm would work as well thousand years in the past as it had in twentieth century barrooms.

The tommy gun was nestling in the crook of my arm, and as I met the incredibly beautiful savage's eyes, something inside me turned to water and I prayed mentally that she wasn't good at reading minds.

She watched me advance toward her expressionlessly. Her eyes were speculative, and her glance flitted from me to Rusty to the pair of trussed captives lined up against the far wall of the cave for the slaughter.

Several feet from the throne I dropped to one knee. I still kept my eyes fixed on hers, however, in spite of what the effort did to a limp little spot in my stomach.

Then I held out both hands, with the tommy gun resting on them, palms upward.

Quite a gesture. After you, lady. Anybody to be killed, I wouldn't *think* of depriving you of the first shot.

The girl on the throne squinted down at me in surprise. She hadn't expected this. And then the surprise gave way to an expression of curiosity and flattered delight. I had counted on the fact that even the most primitive of women would be both inordinately curious and most susceptible to flattery.

Almost without thinking, the girl rose slightly in the throne chair and reached forward to take the tommy gun from my hands. But I'd figured on that and placed myself so she'd have to—

She stood up and descended one step.

I drew my arms in ever so slightly.

She reached forward, stepping down the second time.

And then I stood up. Stood up and jammed the gun right smack into her naked middle, wrapping one arm around her shoulder and throat as I did so!

"Cover, Rusty!" I yelled.

I whirled, with the snarling girl in my arms, shifting the tommy gun muzzle until it bored unpleasantly into her back. But now I could see the swarming Neanderthals in the cave. And I could hear the ominous, animal-throated growls that rose to their lips as they dully perceived what had happened.

One of them, a huge, lumbering ape, made a rush toward me.

I heard Rusty's gun chatter, and saw the human monster tumble awkwardly forward to the floor, face splattered with his own blood.

That stopped them all for a moment. Even the girl I held as hostage in my arms. She stopped squirming the instant she saw the Neanderthal tumble. Obviously, she had just recalled that the weapon I had pressed into her lovely golden back was deadly.

Leeds had freed his leg thongs, now, and was rubbing the circulation back into his muscles as Rusty continued to keep a covering scrutiny on the white and frightened ape creatures who now milled around uncertainly at a safe distance from us.

Then I saw him turn to the young savage, who had freed himself in half the time that Leeds had. He muttered something to the loin-clothed young primitive, and I had scarcely time to wonder how in the hell Leeds was communicating intelligibly with him, when Rusty yelled in my direction.

"What now, Napoleon? Those damned apes is jammed in this cave. We've not enough ammunition to cut

our way through 'em, remember?"

I realized that, of course. The aboriginals were now almost fifty thick, massed between the cave entrance and where we stood on the throne dais.

Leeds shouted, then, gesturing toward the side entrance through which I'd first seen the beautiful savage wench make her appearance.

"A corridor passage," he called. "Yenga, here, knows the way. We'll follow him."

Yenga. I had time to note that man but briefly, and marvel. In that short time, Leeds must have exchanged calling cards with the comparatively civilized young savage in the loin cloth. But it wasn't surprising. Nothing was ever surprising where Leeds McAndrews was concerned. And now I was damned thankful that he was recognized by at least one chamber of commerce in this time era as a right guy. For Yenga, if that was the savage youth's name, was going to be valuable.

THE savage youngster in the loin cloth had darted toward the side entrance just off the throne dais that Leeds had indicated. And now, still grappling with my lovely problem, I moved slowly across the stone platform toward that exit.

The savage wench was very still, now, very willing to do what seemed to be the thing to keep her alive. For which I was fortunate. Had she struggled, I don't know if I'd have had the heart to plug her. Women are always women, no matter what heels they may be by human standards. And rubbing out such a beautiful, though malignant, wench, would have taken quite an effort on my part.

None of the aboriginals were making a move toward us. The sight of their fellow flathead lying in a spreading pool of his own blood, had stopped them all. I think the fact that Rusty had killed the guy from such a distance and so mysteriously was really the only factor that kept them from all rushing us at once.

They were scared and bewitched. And the dragging around I was giving their Queen Bee didn't add to the prestige of the primitive young wench, at least in the eyes of her flatheaded aboriginal yes-men.

Leeds, Rusty, and the young Yenga were waiting at the side cave corridor when I got there. Rusty stood outside a little, keeping his gun trained on the mob of primitives.

Leeds had the thongs with which he and Yenga had been bound. Excellent foresight. And now he used them to tie the sultry and savage wench up hand and foot, relieving me of some of my burden and freeing me to use my tommy gun should it be necessary.

Yenga, the young black maned savage, grunted something at Leeds, and I'll be damned if the lanky McAndrews didn't seem to understand the grunt jargon.

"He says we'd better get going," Leeds translated, "but fast!"

CHAPTER IX

Tank vs. Dinosaur

TURNING, I glanced down the darkened passage of the cave corridor. From somewhere back at the outlet of it, there came a sudden damp gust of wind.

"What about this dame?" I demanded.

Leeds hesitated.

"We'd better take her along for a bit," he said. "Otherwise she'd be making trouble for us the instant we left her."

I nodded toward Yenga. "How about

having your nice little friend carry her awhile?" I suggested. "That would leave Rusty and me free to cover our getaway with the tommies."

Leeds nodded. He turned to the young savage with the long black hair and the surprisingly intelligent face. Slowly, he made a few well chosen grunts. I listened astounded, and was further amazed when the young primitive seemed to catch on. He nodded, stepped over to where the golden haired female tigress lay tied hand and foot. In an instant he'd swept her up over his massive young shoulder and turned back down the corridor.

"You seem to be the interpreter," I said to Leeds. "You move along with Yenga. Rusty and I will cover."

The going was tough through the dark and slippery cave passage. Leeds and Yenga, up in front, stopped every so often to wait for Rusty and me. Only once did a valorous and curious Neanderthal attempt to follow us down the corridor. And when he poked his nose into the entrance, the light behind him outlined him as a perfect target. I brought him down with a short burst from my tommy gun.

It must have been fully five minutes later, after we'd covered several bends and turns in the black, dank passage, that we saw the pinpoint of light that promised exit and escape.

I mentally breathed a prayer of thanks for our having Yenga on our side of the fence. Without him, we'd never have found our way through this labyrinth. Then, some three minutes later, Yenga, with the bound girl still over his shoulder, and Leeds stood waiting at the exit as Rusty and I scrambled and slipped hastily up to them.

The exit to which Yenga had led us was on a high cliff side, overlooking a deep jungle valley. And even as we stood there catching our breath, the loin-skinned lad was pointing down to the right of the valley at an ascending stretch of cleared ground running up toward the mountain on which we stood.

He grunted something briefly to Leeds, making signs with his hands. And while I was waiting for my lean, lanky chum to interpret the primitive jargon, I caught the first sign of what Yenga was driving at when he'd pointed to that ascending stretch of clearing.

There was movement, faint but noticeable, in the tangled jungle underbrush around that clearing. Movement that indicated the presence of something other than animal life. Yenga had dropped the incredibly beautiful savage wench to the ground now, and was grunting something further to Leeds, with additional hand gestures.

"Yenga's tribe is staging an attack," Leeds said, turning to me. "You can notice them over by that clearing, if you look closely enough. They've planned a raid on the Neanderthal bunch we just gave the slip to. That clearing over there leads to the other side of this mountain, or the front of the cave community we just left."

I squinted hard, trying to see something more than just the suggestion of movement that I'd first noticed. Dawn was turning the sky from black to gray, now, and visibility was fairly good across the deep little valley.

"How many of them are there?" I asked.

"Four or five hundred," Leeds said.

"And are they all like Yenga, I mean, somewhat more civilized than those flatheads we just left behind?"

LEEDS nodded. "They're a strangely advanced level of society in this primitive world. Pretty far ahead of the flatheads. It's hard to understand how they progressed to the stage they're now in, when the rest of the human ele-

ment in this time forsaken era are still just a stage past the apes."

"Then they shouldn't have any trouble whipping the flatheads," I said. "Especially since we've got the flatheads' renegade princess neatly tied and out of the struggle."

Leeds shook his head dubiously. "It's not as easy as that," he declared. "I told you that the tribe Yenga is part of numbers some four or five hundred. But I didn't add that there're more than two thousand of these flatheads holding this mountain."

I whistled. "I see what you mean."

Leeds paused a moment. "Our tank," he said, pointing with his finger over the cliff edge, "is down there on the other side of the valley. We're almost out of rounds for the tommy guns, and they wouldn't be enough to handle a couple of thousand Neanderthals alone. Plenty of gun power and ammunition in the M-3, however," he concluded.

"Listen," I began, getting what he was driving at.

"We're fighting men, aren't we?" Leeds asked. "No matter what time era this happens to be, we're still fighting men. We don't know if we're going to get out of this mess we're in, ever. And if we've got to stay around this neck of time from now on in, I think it'd be a good idea to see to it that we'll be living with primitives who have a slant on things a little closer to our own."

"Listen," I picked up where he'd cut me off. "You don't have to talk us into anything, Leeds. Ever since we were clubbed cold by those flatheads, Rusty and I have been aching to get back. How far is the tank, in minutes, mean?"

Leeds looked down across the valley. "About ten or fifteen minutes away, with Yenga as a guide," he said.

Rusty came up beside us. He'd been standing there quietly, listening to us and figuring it out.

"What in the hell are we waiting for?" he said.

Leeds grinned. "I don't know why I thought I'd have to reason with you mugs," he said.

"How about the dame?" Rusty pointed to where the renegade wench of the wondrous beauty lay beside Yenga's feet.

Leeds thought a moment. "Taking her along would only slow things up."

"We'll stick her behind a big boulder," I suggested. "She's tied tight enough to stay that way."

"She'll starve to death," Rusty protested.

"We'll come back for her when we've mopped up on the flatheads," Leeds said. "Then we can turn her over to the tribe she loused on. They can decide their own justice."

"Fair enough," I told him. "Now let Yenga in on it and we'll get started."

Leeds turned to the blackhaired young savage in the loin cloth. He made gestures with his hands, pointed across the valley, and grunted one or two terse sound-words.

Yenga seemed to catch, for his lips went flat against his white teeth in a savagely pleased smile. He nodded his head rapidly up and down.

I turned and looked around the cliff edge on which we stood. There was a large boulder several yards away, and I jerked my thumb at it, then pointed at the girl on the ground.

"Let's file her away for future reference," I said.

Leeds nodded, and with Yenga, lifted the girl and carried her over behind the boulder. Her mouth was tight with rage, and her eyes flashed electrical sparks, but she didn't make any sound.

Yenga and Leeds reappeared from behind the boulder.

"Let's get started," said Rusty. He pointed down toward the cleared, rising elevation at the corner of the valley. "They're getting under way," he said.

We both followed his gesture. Squinting hard, I could see the evidences of motion in the tangled underbrush around the clearing growing more definitely obvious. The motion was toward the mountain where the flatheads, unsuspecting, were probably still trying to figure out what they should do about the loss of their leader.

"Yeah," I said. "We'd better get stepping."

YENGA took us down a side trail, steep and rocky and hidden by thorny green brush that tore sections of skin from our faces as we moved along its twisting course.

After about five minutes we were in the moist green underfooting of the valley bed itself. And here the going became even tougher. There were vines and trailers that hung low over the scantily marked trail Yenga now guided us along; some of them, almost as if alive, catching and twisting around our legs and arms to further slow up our progress.

Although the sun wasn't up as yet, the very dank heaviness of the jungle around us was hot and humid, so that we were bathed in sweat after five more minutes following the swift, lithe leadership of Yenga.

And it was five minutes after that when Yenga, some ten yards on ahead of us, suddenly disappeared from sight around the bend of the trail.

When we caught up with him he was waiting for us in a clearing. The same clearing in which we had left the tank; and the sight of the M-3, big and tough and deadly looking, was the most wonderful thing in the world.

Rusty put our emotions into words.

"Baby!" he yelped. "Oh, you pretty, pretty, baby!"

Rusty and I and Leeds were all grinning like three idiots as we ran to the side of the M-3. Rusty was first at its side. And the big damned fool draped an arm around the front of it, patting and stroking the steel surface.

"To think I'd ever be glad to see you again," Rusty told the tank. "Oh, you great big beautiful doll!"

"No necking," Leeds grinned. "We've got some fighting to do."

"How'll we get back to those babies?" I asked.

"Yenga can ride the tank and guide us," Leeds said.

I busied myself making a thorough, though hasty, check of the M-3, and found everything still in perfect order. The old gal was raring to go.

Then Leeds was grunting and gesturing and explaining to Yenga exactly what he wanted, and the savage youth was nodding his black maned head excitedly.

Rusty clambered up through the tower and into the tank. I followed him; and Leeds, finishing his explanations to Yenga, hoisted himself up into tower position.

I could hear Yenga taking his place on the front of the tank, and then at Leeds' signal we started up. The sound and feel of something familiar once again was something that brought a lump to my throat. No matter where in the hell we were in time, we were at least once again where any self-respecting tank fighters ought to be—moving out to battle.

RUSTY chortled and babbled and acted like a small child with a day off from school as he ordered his guns while we jounced along through the tangled jungle four minutes later.

Yenga was taking us to the flat-

heads' mountain side cave camp by a different route. And the strong young savage seemed to know what were and were not impassable obstacles for the M-3. He ordered us through certain sections that we crashed over with ease, and sent us skittering around spots that might have held us up for minutes. He was doing a job of it.

And when at last we rolled out onto an ascending stretch of clearing, I knew that we were covering the terrain that led directly up to the mountain stronghold of the Neanderthal bunch. And it was as I turned to Rusty to yell something at him, that I heard the first wild shouts far up ahead of us and saw the swarm of loin skinned savages pouring from crags and bushes and crannies halfway up the mountain, some eight hundred yards from the Neanderthals' encampment.

I could tell from the very size, swiftness, and grace of them that they were Yenga's tribe, and that the attack on the aborigines had begun!

"Get the lead outta this garbage can," Rusty yelled. "There's fighting starting, and we're being left outta it."

Up ahead, now, I saw the first signs of the burly, flatheaded Neanderthals rushing from their caves, carrying clubs and stone knives, and hefty rocks of no little size.

They met the attack of their less crude brethren with wild fury, and the wave of Neanderthals meshed and locked with that of the attackers from Yenga's tribe.

Yenga's bunch were hurling smaller missiles, rocks about the size of a hand grenade. And I saw the method of their attack instantly. It was obvious that they didn't want any hand-to-hand combat with the ape-like aborigines, knowing that they wouldn't have equal brute strength. As a consequence, they waited until the ape-like flatheads drew within six or eight feet, then letting fly with their grenade sized rocks. Their aim would have put Bob Feller to shame, for one after another, the brutish defenders sprawled to the green moss of the clearing, skulls crushed by the well aimed missiles.

But additional waves of Neanderthal reinforcements were pouring from the caves, and although the attackers carried from five to six grenade sized rocks in crude leather sacks strapped to their sides, they couldn't throw them forever. It was apparent that they'd be out of ammunition shortly, with more and more Neanderthals pouring down to grapple with them.

But the bunch from Yenga's tribe weren't as dumb as I thought they'd be. Evidently they'd realized this would happen, and now they were drawing their lines back in as orderly a tactical retreat as I'd ever witnessed. In their wake they left the dead bodies of more than forty Neanderthals, while only five or six of their own—who'd been unfortunate enough to run out of ammunition too soon—lay dead beside the brutes they'd attacked.

And then Rusty, operating our cannon without orders, let loose with an earth shaking shot that hit far up behind the struggling savages and plowed up a flower of black earth less than twenty feet from the Neanderthals' cave quarters.

It had the desired effect. The ape-like aborigines turned and ran like hell back to their mountainside stronghold. And this gave Yenga's bunch a chance to complete their orderly retreat.

We moved on perhaps another four hundred yards, and I could hear Yenga, still atop our tank, yelling shrill grunts to his tribesmen who had retreated to the brush once more.

I got the stop signal from Leeds.

His head poked down.

"Ask Rusty if he can reach the mountainside where the brutes have their caves from this distance," he said.

Through my front vision slot, I could see Yenga clambering down from the tank and trotting across the clearing toward his tribesmen.

"What's the pitch?" I demanded.

"I told Yenga to hold back his bunch until we give the mopping up orders," Leeds said. "I have an idea. Ask Rusty about that range."

I asked Rusty.

"What the hell," he grinned, "why not?"

I repeated it to Leeds.

"Climb out, both of you," he said, "and I'll show you what I have in mind."

We left the tank and climbed down beside Leeds. He pointed up the ascending section of clearing, indicating the cave community stronghold up there against the side of the mountain.

And then I realized what Leeds was getting at. The entire Neanderthal cave stronghold was built underneath a gigantic overhanging crag some two hundred feet above it.

"Supposing Yenga's bunch, without getting too close, can draw the Neanderthals out after 'em," Leeds said.

"That'd be easy enough," I agreed. "Then what?"

"Then Rusty, banging away with well placed cannon fire, could blast the hell out of that overhang. Those big brutes would be buried alive under God knows how many tons of rock."

Rusty frowned. "We'd have to get up a little closer," he said. "Maybe a hundred yards more."

"But then you could do it?" Leeds asked.

Rusty grinned. "What do you think?"

Leeds grinned back, then turned toward the underbrush where we'd seen Yenga disappear after this fellow tribesmen. He waved his hands four times, semaphore fashion.

"Let's go," Leeds said. "I've given Yenga the signal to start."

WE WERE moving along slowly a minute later, giving Yenga's bunch a chance to get well up to the clearing, close but not too close. Rusty, at his cannon beside me, was grinning delightedly.

"Okay," Rusty said a minute later. "I got range enough."

We halted. Ahead, the wave of Yenga's savage buddies swept up toward the cave community, yelling like hell and hurling rocks. And then it started to rain. Just like that. A deluge, breaking from the gray skies without the slightest announcement. It was a terrific downpour. The sound of it banged like hail against the tank sides.

Rusty cursed. "Makes it tougher," he said. "Can hardly see a damned thing through this!"

But even through the sheet of the downpour, I could see that the Neanderthals were pouring from their cave, rushing out to meet this second assault from Yenga's tribe. And then I caught the faintest glimpse of something else. Something that made me refuse to believe my eyes. I wasn't certain, but I thought for an instant that I'd had a glimpse of the incredibly gorgeous renegade wench up there near the caves. How on earth she'd be found, or returned to her thick-witted subjects, I didn't have time to ponder.

"For God's sake," Leeds yelled down. "Get that range and start hammering away. If you don't hurry Yenga's bait will be gobbled up by those flatheaded slobs!"

Rusty had the cannon trained. And then, as the gun blasted, the entire landscape was bathed in a jagged white flash of lightning, affording us a split-second view of the effect of that burst.

It hit the overhang back and to the right, spraying a shower of rock and slag in every direction, and starting a jagged break along the very base of it.

"Jeeeudas!" Rusty muttered. "My eyes are going back on me. That was three feet from where I wanted to place it."

I didn't have time to grin. The next cannon blast shook loose in half a minute. There was no lightning this time to show us its effect, and for twenty awful seconds we held our breath, guessing. The sudden awful crashing that followed a split second later was a most beautiful sound, sweeter than music. Rusty's second shot had done it. The overhang was crashing down with a tremendous roaring fury!

"You got 'em! You got 'em! Oh, you sweetheart!"

It was Leeds' voice, and he was poking his head down from the tower and chortling like a man gone mad.

"You buried the whole damned bunch," he yelled. "There won't be one of 'em left alive!"

But we could still hear it. The noise of the thunderous avalanche started down that mountainside by Rusty's magnificent gun work. It was the wildest, angriest rumble of stone and mountain you've ever heard.

"What about us?" I yelled up at Leeds. "Hadn't we better back out of the path of any complications that the avalanche might start?"

A savagely blinding flash of lightning seared the sky at that moment. It was almost too close for comfort. And then, less than half a second after that, another similar jagged ribbon of electrical fury split the air.

Leeds McAndrews suddenly poked his head down from the tower.

"Burt," he yelled. "Burt, poke your nose out and see what's going on!"

He clambered up out of the way, and I followed him, sticking my head out of the tower. Leeds was pointing excitedly up at the mountainside. Pointing to the bare, scarred side where Rusty's shots had blasted loose the overhang.

Lightning flashes, dozens of licking tongues of them were slashing white hot ribbons at that surface. Hardly ten seconds passed between each one.

"Some mineral, some conductive ore, most have been behind that overhang," Leeds said excitedly. "It's drawing every streak of lightning in the sky toward it!"

"A damned good reason for our getting away from here," I said. "Climb in and I'll wheel this baby around and away. We wanta find some healthier spot in this jungle than here!"

Leeds was grabbing my shoulder, and his fingers were digging hard into my arm. He was pointing again; pointing at the swarms of primitives, Yenga's tribe, dashing down the mountainside toward us.

"They're running away from it, too," Leeds said. "They don't even want to stick around and dance about their victory."

"Once again I admire their brains," I said. "Climb in and let's set a pace for them."

Leeds shook his head. "It's a natural," he said. "It's the only thing near a chance."

"What are you babbling about?" I asked.

"We're going up there," Leeds said. "Over the debris left by the avalanche.

Smack up into that electrical storm belt!"

"Have you lost your mind?" I grabbed his arm and tried to pull him down into the tank.

"Don't you see?" Leeds demanded. "It's a chance. We got here through electrical energy waves as they reacted on the damned radio device in our tank. It's the only way we'll ever leave. We can't hang around here for centuries, waiting for another lucky blast of lightning to strike us. We may never have the chance to walk right into it again!"

AND then I got it. Got it and felt suddenly weak inside. For even though it was a chance, it was no more than that. It might work, or it might mean the end of all of us. I looked up there at that constant belt of ragged white flashes and gulped.

"Damn you, McAndrews," I said. "Get down into the tank. I'll put Rusty in the tower. See if you can get that damned mechanism in the same state as it was before!"

Rusty poked his head into the tower. "What's up?" he demanded.

"You're top man," I said. "Leeds wants to tinker with the radio device again."

Rusty gave me a disgusted glance. "Are you nuts?"

"That's an order," I snapped.

Grumbling, Rusty changed places with Leeds, and then we were all at stations again, and I was responding to Rusty's starting signal. We lumbered up the inclined clearing, headed toward that flashing fury up on the mountainside, while Leeds muttered frantically to himself and messed around with the radio device.

The aborigines from Yenga's tribe passed us half way along the ascension, going in the opposite direction. The glances they gave the tank were wild and frightened, but the glances they shot over their shoulders at the electrical storm belt up on that mountainside were those of stark terror.

"Anytime anyone ever tries to tell me primitives had no brains," I grumbled, "I'll spit in their eye. That's the direction in which we ought to be traveling."

"But we aren't," Leeds said tightly. "Keep on moving."

By now we were climbing up and over and around the debris and rock left by the avalanche, and it was one solid hell of slam-bang bouncing around we got. I could hear Rusty's profanity tearing loose from the tower.

And then, a scant three hundred yards off from the lightning belt, we heard the noise that was like thunder, trumpeting, and grunting all in one.

It was like no other noise I'd ever heard in all my life. It sounded alive.

Rusty's yell followed it immediately. And we hit an up-bounce an instant later that gave a brief and hideous view of the cause of the noise.

My yell was drowned in the second thunderous roar of the beast that stood less than fifty yards from us, directly between our tank and the flashing lightning fury on the mountainside.

And when I say beast, I mean dinosaur!

My heart was in my throat, and unable to speak, I tugged at Leeds' sleeve, pointing frantically out the vision slot. He leaned over, peered out and saw the dinosaur.

His face was chalk white when he turned to me.

"What a lovely little obstruction we find in our way," he managed.

"Get to post at the cannon," I snapped. Leeds scrambled back to the gun position.

There was another terrible roar from the huge beast, and it started toward us, its long neck and snake-like head swinging combatively back and forth as it sized us up.

"I'm finding a flat spot," I yelled at Leeds. "Then we stop and let that monstrosity make the next move. In a twenty yard range, open up!"

It took another half minute to find the spot I wanted; another half minute and another twenty yards. That left the monster just thirty yards off. It was still surveying us, but moving closer cautiously.

Rusty booted me in the side of my helmet, and I inched over while he came down. Wordlessly, he went to the other gun, as I slid further out of the way. I clambered around and up toward the tower.

"I'll signal from there," I yelled. "I'll have a better view of the damned thing."

I poked my head out of the tower and almost choked to death as my heart skyrocketed up to meet my Adam's apple.

THE head of the horrible monster was swinging out on that long, snake-like neck until it was less than thirty feet from the tower of the tank.

I kicked Rusty down below and yelled, "Fire!" at the same instant.

Leeds and Rusty fired simultaneously. And I saw the sudden flash of enraged flame shoot into the queer eyes of the thing as its head snapped up and back and its body recoiled from the force of the gun blasts.

There were two huge rents in the thing's hide. Rents from which poured a bluish ooze that must have been blood.

"Again!" I yelled.

Once more our M-3's guns blasted, and the huge beast thrashed backward, its enormous tail slapping dangerously around, almost swiping our tank out of existence.

It trumpeted then; that terrifying roar. Trumpeted and started to move sluggishly, limpingly, toward us. There was hell and fury in those wild eyes.

"Give it!" I yelled.

Rusty and Leeds blasted loose again. Blasted loose just as the horrible head of the monster was sweeping down directly at me in the tower. I closed my eyes, and clenched my teeth.

There was an enraged, gurgling bellow from the beast, followed by the sounds of terrible threshing, and stone and slag and rock banged against the sides of our tank.

I opened my eyes.

The dinosaur lay some twenty yards off, twisting and thrashing wildly on its side. But its efforts were growing feebler every second. And I knew we'd finished it off!

We shifted back to our own positions then, with the exception of Rusty, who went up into the tower once more. None of us said a word during this rapid reshuffling. We didn't feel up to it.

Rusty gave me the signal and we were off again, picking our way around the still dying hulk of the huge dinosaur. The rain was lessening in force, and up ahead—a scant hundred yards or so now—the lightning flashes in the area of the cliff scar were less frequent.

Leeds was mumbling and cursing as he saw this, and we were knocking ourselves out, taking it the hardest and the fastest way. Fifty yards, now, and we hung on for dear life as we bounced from crag to boulder to brush.

"Oh, God," Leeds groaned, "we'll never make it!"

And at that instant the white flash of the lightning bolt seared down at us, splitting the rock less than ten feet

from the tank. I had a sensation of being hurtled forward, and smashing my head hard against the side of the tank. I could hear Rusty yelling something at the top of his lungs, while Leeds cursed like a madman. . . .

I WAS dragging my helmet off and sliding along on my stomach to get out of the tower exit. We were flat on our side, tipped completely over, and I could hear the rain still pounding against the metal shell of our tank.

I slithered out the tower and plunked flat on my face into a mire of mud. Then Rusty was helping me to my feet, and Leeds was just crawling out and we turned to help him.

We stood there, then, the three of us, drinking in the country landscape like thirsty nomads rescued from a desert. There was no mountain, no avalanche debris, no stinking sweet primeval valley.

There was just good old Georgia!

Rusty was looking strangely sheepish.

"Look, Burt," he said, plucking at my sleeve, his face struggling between emotions of shame and bewilderment, "I'm sorry I dozed off. Damnedest thing. Never done it before in all my life!"

For a minute I didn't get it. Then I looked at Leeds. There was growing realization on his face. And in the glance we exchanged, there passed a silent agreement to carry it out this way. For obviously, the redheaded lug had instantly decided that what had happened was nothing but a dream!

"You," said Leeds sharply, "and your damned dreams. You're to blame for spilling us like this. You had the tower position."

"Hell," I said to Leeds, "it's just lucky the redheaded ape didn't let us plough head on into a stone wall."

"Ape!" Rusty said, snapping his fingers. "There was guys like apes in my dream. And you and Leeds was there. Damnedest thing, huh?"

It was better this way. My, so much better. For even though Leeds and I knew the facts we'd never be such fools as to put ourselves in line for the booby hatch by spilling such a yarn to Old Blue Bolt. And Rusty, bless his little soul, would have spread the story all over camp. *But*—and I took a deep breath and thanked God—the redhead figured it was all a dream.

"Yeah," I said, feeling the nice, warm twentieth century, Georgia rain cooling my forehead. "Yeah, it was certainly the damnedest thing!"

Leeds grinned at this perfect understatement. . . .

« PROBLEM IN ACID »

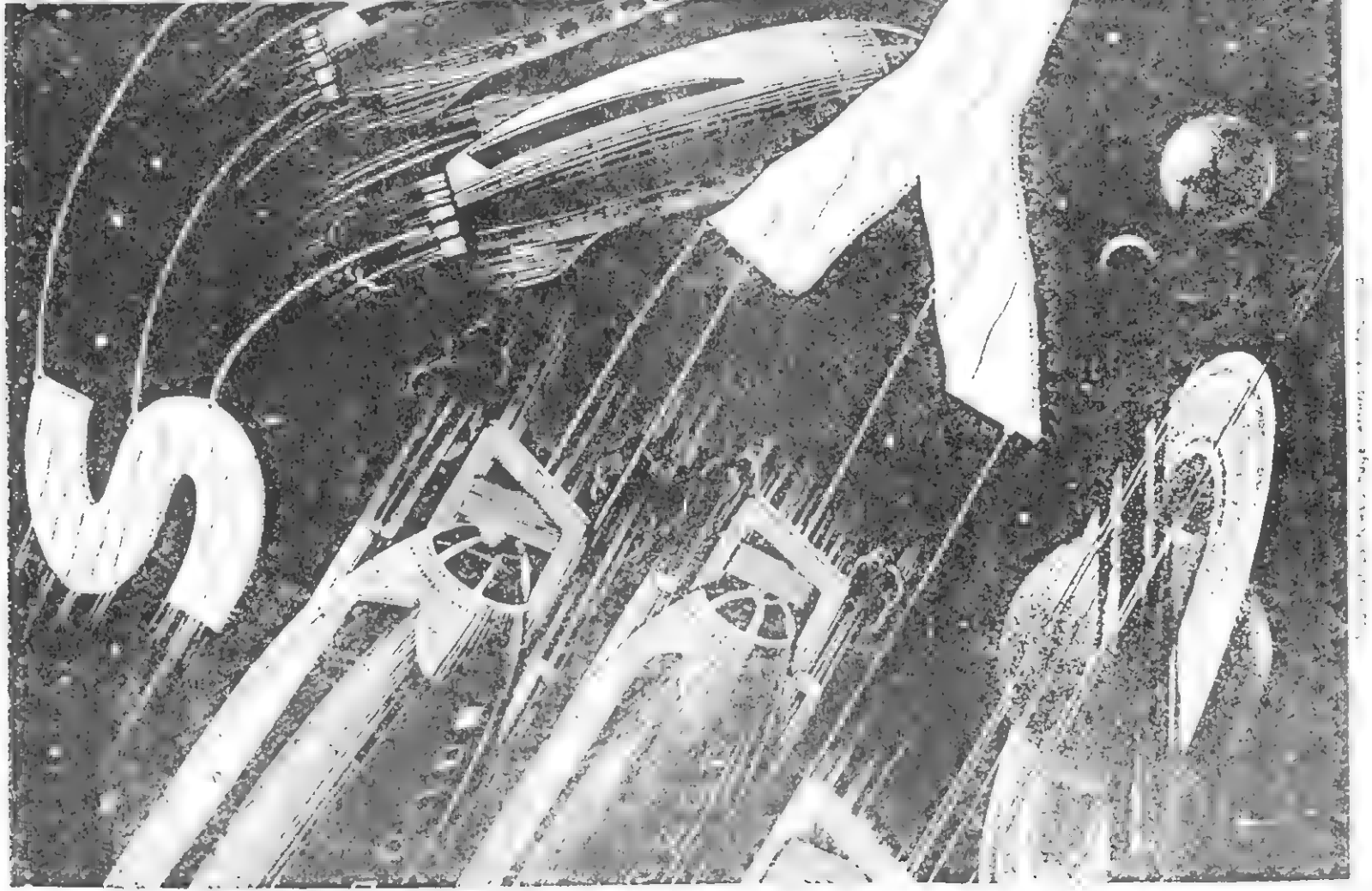
SCIENCE has long been trying to fathom the problem of shipping and storing highly corrosive hydrochloric acid in containers other than glass. The answer is a rare element called rhenium which is extremely hard and heavy.

Chemists have discovered how to electroplate rhenium on copper, brass, aluminum, tin, and other metals. Rhenium, being very resistant to hydrochloric acid, should revolutionize this industry. The acid can be stored in rhenium-lined tanks and shipped inexpensively in tank cars lined with rhenium. The costly method used before this important discovery was storage and shipment in glass bottles protected by strong wooden containers.

Until now hydrochloric acid could not be stored and shipped in suitable metal containers the way sulphuric and nitric acids could. This new knowledge puts the three acids on an even par.

Among the chemical elements rhenium is one of the heaviest metals. It is about as heavy as tungsten and its atomic number is 75. It was discovered in 1925 by a German named Noddack who named it after the river Rhine.

Rhenium is obtained at a nominal cost from the slime waste products of copper refining plants.



ELECTION CAMPAIGN ON SATURN

by MILTON KALETSKY

One electrifying word glowed in space—and it was powerful enough to overwhelm any other campaign!

"YOU'LL do what I say, or else—!"

The large paunchy man behind the huge expensive desk leaned back in his luxurious leather chair and glared with cold threatening eyes at the two nervous men sitting opposite him.

"But boss, that stuff ain't in our line," one of them protested uneasily. "You know, if you want a guy bumped off for meddlin' in your affairs, we can fix it. And if you're sorta interested in a cargo of stuff that's goin' from one planet to another, we can fix it so's the cargo appears on the way—you know. But sorta disappears on the way—you know. But mixin' in politics, especially Saturnian politics, aw, boss, we dunno what it's all about."

The fat man leaned forward, rolling the cigar of finest Venusian tobacco between his thick lips with lusty enjoyment.

"Listen, Willie." He jabbed a stubby bejeweled finger at the tall stringy man and then at his short thick-set companion, "And you too, Joey. When I give an order, I don't want arguments. I want action!"

He paused briefly before concluding sarcastically, "Or maybe you'd rather go back to work in the lunar mines?"

"Oh, gee boss, no!" Willie's lanky body twisted uncomfortably in his loose baggy clothes, his dark scarred face clearly showing fear.

"Then shut up and listen to me." The fat man relaxed, tossed away his cigar and started chewing on another. The pale, dapper little man called Joey, ignoring his employer's stern tones, gazed raptly at the discarded cigar in the ash tray. He seemed about to reach out and seize it when the man across the desk spoke again.

"In a few weeks there'll be an election on Saturn. The only two candidates for the premiership are Ysuol and Melko. The one who's elected will be practically dictator of Saturn—and *I* want to dictate to *him!*"

Over the big man's flabby features came the hard, savage look that made Warner Jaxon the man most feared by those who knew him, and the two to whom he was speaking knew him well, better, in fact, than they cared to.

"Saturn has the only good Uranium-260 mines in the solar system," Jaxon went on, "and Earth needs a large and steady supply for its atomic power plants. You know that without U-260

modern civilization would collapse in a few weeks, and you'd think the Saturnians would let us have the mines no matter who is elected. Didn't we civilize them, didn't we give them our language? Why, they spoke only in grunts before we taught them English. But they have no gratitude, always talking about how many Saturnians were killed while we civilized them. The stubborn fools . . ."

HE stopped abruptly, frowning at his cigar. Tossing it aside, he selected another, then glared again at his two employees.

"But all that's beside the point," he said. "What matters is that old BascO-Lar, that dirty Martian swindler, has bribed Melko and the whole Melko party. If Melko's elected, that crooked Martian will get those mines and he'll raise the price of U-260 as high as he likes. But if Ysuol's elected, well, I paid him—I mean I've contributed heavily to his campaign fund, so I expect some return on my, er . . . investment."

He paused to glower at Willie.

"What are you snickering about?" he snapped.

"Oh, nothin', boss, nothin'." With an effort, Willie hastily assumed a serious expression. Joey was still giving all his attention to the chewed-up cigar.

With narrowed eyes, Jaxon spoke harshly. "My motives are purely patriotic. I want to assure an adequate supply of U-260 for Earth. Of course, if I get control of those mines I will have to raise the price a little. A man has to make a reasonable profit, you understand. But profit is entirely a secondary consideration."

"Oh sure, sure," Willie interjected quickly, nodding violently.

"And yet," said Jaxon, half to himself, "there will be millions in this."

The mention of money woke Joey to new interest in what was going on around him. He straightened up and listened eagerly.

"Yes," murmured Jaxon, "more millions than you can count!"

"Gee, boss," exclaimed Joey, wide-eyed, "you mean more than twenty?"

Jaxon frowned disgustedly. "Shut up! Willie, why do you keep this idiot around you?"

"Aw, boss, he's okay," Willie protested earnestly. "Maybe not so good with the brains but swell with the old knockout gadget."

"You bet," Joey chirped gaily. With a snap of his wrist, a small proton pistol appeared in his hand and a pale blue ray flashed dangerously close to Jaxon's ear. The magnate paled and ducked, then turned scarlet in anger.

"Put that gun down, you fool!" he stormed.

"Okay, okay." Joey obligingly let the weapon slide back into his sleeve.

"See, boss," smiled Willie, "me an' Joe make a swell team—brawn and brains both."

Jaxon grunted derisively. "Yeah, together you're almost as smart as a moron."

"Gosh! Thanks, boss!" Joey was greatly pleased. A broad grin lighting his face, he added questioningly, "Willie, what's a moron?"

JAXON savagely ordered him to be quiet, then continued swiftly. "Here's the situation, boys. Much as I hate to admit it, BascOLar and Melko caught me asleep this time. They've bought up every minute of time on all radio-televisor stations on Saturn and they've got exclusive rights for political advertising in all newspapers and magazines. All over Saturn, all you can see and hear is 'Melko, Melko, Melko!' 'Melko the working man's friend!'

'Melko will do this for you, Melko will do that for you . . .' Bah! All the usual political boloney. But it's effective. You know how impressionable the Saturnians are. Tell them something a few times and they believe it. All *we* have to help put Ysuol across is a few street-corner speakers, reaching just a few thousand people, while the radio-televisors reach millions. No wonder the Gallup poll shows voters favoring Melko two to one right now, and he's gaining every day."

The financier lapsed into gloomy silence, biting his cigar to pieces. Joey watched the distruction, his usually blank face showing a faint trace of unutterable yearning.

"But, boss." Willie hesitantly broke the silence. "What can we do? If all those smart guys in your advertising department and in Ysuol's gang couldn't figure out a scheme, how can we?"

Jaxon made an impatient gesture. "I know, I know." There was irritation in his voice. "You don't have to remind me that you're dumb. But I'm desperate for a plan, so I want everybody, even you, to try to swing the election to Ysuol. Do something! Do anything! Go to Saturn and stir up a scandal with Melko in it! Start a civil war and blame it on Melko! That's what *I* want to do, but my associates are a bunch of cowardly dogs, afraid to get mixed up in Saturn's politics. But they'll do what I say, or else—!"

"Why, sure," nodded Willie earnestly, "it's as good as committin' suicide to stick yer nose in a Saturn election. Every day right now guys are gettin' one-way tickets to the Milky Way. Melko an' Ysuol hafta keep armies to pertect them."

"Just the same, those are my orders." Jaxon's cold voice showed he was unmoved by his henchman's objections. "Scared or not, get to work, Willie. As for Joey, I guess he's too imbecilic to be frightened."

Joey smiled ecstatically. "Gee, thanks, boss!" Then his eyes grew puzzled and wondering. "Hey, Willie, what's 'imbecilic' mean?"

Willie ignored him. "Okay, boss," he muttered. "I'll do what I can."

The magnate regarded him contemptuously. "Remember, if you fail, back you go where you came from, into the deepest, dirtiest mine on the moon!"

Willie stood up, tugging at his partner's arm, but the little man didn't move. He was gazing raptly at the box of Venusian cigars, into which Jaxon's plump hand was digging.

Noticing his stare, the financier smiled sourly.

"Get out, Joey. Don't expect me to hand out these cigars to mugs like you. Only a few thousand of these cigars are made each year and I get most of them. Cost me nearly a hundred dollars each."

Joey gulped. "Geeee!" he breathed, and as Willie dragged him from the room, his eyes still lingered longingly on the cigars.

A FEW minutes later, their new sport model rocket coupe settled gently onto the roof of McGinnity's Run Rendezvous where they could always be found when it wasn't absolutely necessary for them to be elsewhere.

Dropping glumly into a quiet corner booth, Willie slid a coin into a slot and pushed a communications button to order two double *trtzinas,* the most potent liquor of the thirtieth century, distilled from Martian corn. Almost immediately, a panel in the wall opened and the drinks slid out. When half his drink had trickled flamingly into his stomach, Willie felt strong enough to tackle their problem.

"Oh, what to do, what to do?" he moaned. "Joe, got any ideas?"

"Sure, let's have another double *trtzina,*" Joey replied promptly, draining his glass.

Willie grimaced in annoyance. "I mean about this election."

"Oh, *that.* Sure, I gotta idea. Let's sorta take Melko ridin' and sorta just by accident he'd sorta fall outa the ship somewhere in space without a suit on, sorta, huh?"

Willie's lips twisted and he shook his head disgustedly. "And what'll Melko's guards be doin' while we try to kidnap him? Nope, I ain't riskin' my life fer nobody, see? This gotta be done safe—an' that means strictly legal."

"Legal? Gee, then we *are* stuck, ain't we?"

Willie frowned thoughtfully, murmuring to himself. "Maybe some nifty dame could work on Melko and get him so dizzy he'd quit politics for her. But that could work two ways. Ysuol is human too."

"Hey, how about this?" Joey waved his hand and the small deadly gun reappeared in his fist. "One whiff of this —and no more Melko."

"Yeah, also no more Willie and Joey," growled the former. "Cantcha remember nothin', you monkey? I just toldya we can't use no rough stuff on account of Melko got an army of guards. What we gotta do is get Ysuol's name where it'll be seen all the time. But where? How? Them birds BascO-Lar an' Melko got all the radio time an' papers workin' for 'em, so I can't figger out nothin'."

He stared gloomily into his glass, emptied it, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. Across the table, Joey nodded sympathetically.

"Looks like there ain't no place left to put Ysuol's name except to hang a sign in the sky."

Willie snorted and flung his glass aside. Running his fingers through his tangled hair, he glared angrily at his partner. "You're about as much good as a hole in a vacuum. Hang a sign in the sky, bah!"

He reached out and jabbed Joey violently in the ribs. Joey wriggled away, putting up a placating hand. "Aw gee, don't get sore. I wuz jus' foolin'."

WILLIE merely scowled moodily and turned away. Drumming on the table with his fingers he grumbled, "Hang a sign in the sky, hang a sign in the sky—oh, what a dumb idea—hang a—*HEY!*"

His sudden shout made Joey jump.

"You got it, Joey!" Willie straightened up and thumped the table enthusiastically. "You got it!"

Joey looked scared and baffled. "Huh? What I got? I feel O.K."

"That's what we'll do. Hang a sign in the sky! Come on. We gotta act fast. Conditions are just right, so we gotta strike now!"

"Strike?" Joey gasped. "Just us two go on strike? Gee, the boss'd be awful sore. He put us back in those mines an'—"

"Oh shut up, you idiot!" Willie snapped, hurriedly searching his pockets for some coins. Dropping them on the table, he dashed out, trailed by the completely bewildered Joey.

A FEW minutes later, as their plane roared down onto the roof of the public library, Joey hesitantly broke into Willie's intense concentration.

"Hey, this is the liberry."

"Yeah, I know."

"But all they got here is books."

"That's what I want, you dummy."

Joey stared at his partner. "Gee," he breathed in awe, "you can read!"

"Shut up and let me think!" Willie barked.

Joey's eyes protruded even further. "Golly, can you do *that* too?"

Willie led the way to the astronomical section where he feverishly scanned a shelf of books and rapidly examined several. Meanwhile Joey loitered impatiently in the unaccustomed surroundings.

After a few minutes, he spoke hesitantly.

"Willie."

"Yeah?"

"What's these here books about?"

"Astronomy."

"What's that?"

"It's about stars."

"Oh, good!" Joey picked up a book at random and eagerly rippled its pages. Frowning disappointedly, he dropped the volume and selected another. Apparently this did not please him either for he promptly dropped it too and wailed plaintively, "Willie!"

"Huh?" said Willie, deep in a set of astronomical tables.

"Where's the dames?"

"What dames?"

"The stars you said was in these books."

For reply, Willie clouted him on the head with a book and broke its cover.

Joey rubbed his head, then relaxed against a wall, smiling dreamily. Presently Willie found the data he wanted, calmly tore several pages from the book and stuffed them into his pocket.

"Okay, let's go," he said to Joey. The latter remained motionless, a happy, almost ecstatic expression on his face.

Willie grinned sarcastically. "And what are you dreaming of, Joey, sweetheart?"

"Gee," sighed Joey, "them Venusian cigars!"

Willie grunted derisively, seized Joey's arm and hurried out, dragging him like a comet and its tail.

WHEN they burst into Jaxon's office atop the mile-high Jaxon Galactic Enterprises Building, they found the financier still sitting slumped at his desk, glumly watching the latest televised news report on a small portable screen. He shut it off as they entered.

"Just got the latest Gallup poll," he muttered. "Melko's getting 84% of the vote now. If that dumb staff of mine doesn't figure out something today, they'll all be on the pick-and-shovel brigade tomorrow."

"Forget it, boss," said Willie soothingly. "I got it all figgered out. Boss, we gotta get Ysuol's name where them Saturnians will see it all the time so's it'll impress itself on them, ain't that it? Well, we're gonna build the biggest sign ever, an' hang it in the sky over Saturn!"

Jaxon shook his head slowly and sadly. "I knew that too much *trtzina* would affect even your feeble mind some day."

"No, boss, I'm not crazy. Listen." With a few quick words and the astronomical tables he'd brought from the library, Willie sketched his idea.

As he listened, Jaxon's expression changed from incredulity and skepticism to amazement and delight. Hauling himself from his seat, he waddled to Willie and pounded him vigorously on the shoulder.

"Willie, you're a genius!"

Willie grinned happily, but Joey looked annoyed. "Gee, boss, Willie's tryin' hard. You shouldn't call him names. Hey Willie, what's a genius, huh?"

Jaxon threw Joey a glare so savage that the little man shrank back into

his chair, mumbled apologetically, "Awri', awri', can't a guy ask nothin'?"

"Now for some fast work!" Jaxon sprang into action, tapping buttons on his desk to summon his aides. A few minutes later, they were all listening attentively at their televisors while the magnate fired a steady stream of orders, swinging his huge organization into high-speed efficient action.

AT the end of the week, Jaxon, Willie, Joey and Jaxon's chief aides took off from Earth in the financier's luxurious space yacht. Behind them came a fleet of the fastest cargo rockets in service. For six days they flashed through the void toward Saturn, then, reaching their goal, they settled on Themis, one of Saturn's small moons. Without a moment's delay, they began construction of the largest engineering project ever undertaken by man, with Jaxon himself planning and directing the whole enterprise.

From Themis to Titan, Saturn's largest moon,* were thrown two long coiled cables of rubra, the marvelous new development in artificial rubber. Stronger than steel, yet almost as light as air, these cables were capable of stretching to many times their length, and with their ends firmly anchored to the two moons, formed an indestructible bridge between them.

Then on the cables as a foundation, out in the emptiness of space where Saturn's gravity was negligible, there were built enormous letters. One thousand miles long and six hundred wide, they were constructed of self-luminous luxite, which, once started glowing, would blaze with a brilliant white light for many weeks.

On Saturn, the first inkling of these events came early one evening when a huge Y suddenly blazed forth in the heavens between Themis and Titan. While startled Saturnians gathered in the streets to stare upwards wonderingly, reporters from Saturnian news services sped spaceward to investigate. Arriving near the scene of construction, they were intercepted and turned away by Jaxon's own patrol ships. The magnate wanted to raise curiosity and excitement on Saturn to as high a pitch as possible before explaining.

When a huge S appeared beside the Y the next day, the purpose of the sign became clear. Two days later, when the complete name shone forth, Jaxon summoned the reporters to an interview.

Receiving them in the expensively furnished study on the space yacht, he read the reporters a statement carefully prepared by his publicity staff.

"It was not because of any personal interest in the election that I, an Earthman, interfered. No, gentlemen, I had higher, nobler motives. I am convinced that Ysuol is the man to lead Saturn into prosperity, that his genius in economic and financial matters will assure boom times for all Saturn, with good jobs and high wages for every working Saturnian. Ysuol is the working Saturnian's friend! Ysuol's tactful diplomacy and patient generosity will enable Saturn and Earth to reach a common understanding and mutually satisfactory solution of their problems. It was these altruistic considerations which led me to build this sign in the sky, at a cost of over half a million dollars. Thank you, gentlemen, you may go."

With these words, Jaxon dismissed them and gave orders for the return

*Titan is 770,000 miles from Saturn, has a diameter of 3,500 miles and a period of sixteen days. Themis is 906,000 miles away, has a diameter of forty miles and a period of twenty-one days.—Ed.

to Earth. Only his heavily armed patrol vessels remained behind to guard the sign.

BACK on Saturn, the campaign approached its climax. The Melko forces, realizing the possible effect of that remarkable sign, frantically scraped together money to build a rival sign for their candidate, only to discover that Jaxon owned all the patents on luxite and would not let them have an ounce. When a search for a substitute material failed, the Melkomen redoubled their televisor and newspaper campaign, pouring new torrents of abuse on Ysuol while lavishly heaping praise on their candidate. All day, all night, the radios blared Melko's name in wild, extravagant speeches:

"Vote for Melko! Melko will bring back prosperity! Melko will end government inefficiency and graft and reduce taxes! Melko will help the farmer, the working man, the industrialist, the rich, the poor, the middle class, the unemployed! Melko will save Saturn! Vote for Melko!"

Meanwhile, the Ysuol party sent new thousands of speakers out to harangue the Saturnians directly. On thousands of street corners they stood and shouted:

"Vote for Ysuol! Ysuol will bring back prosperity! Ysuol will end government inefficiency and graft and reduce taxes! Ysuol will help the farmer, the working man, the industrialist, the rich, the poor, the middle class, the unemployed! Ysuol will save Saturn! Vote for Ysuol!"

But the howls and ravings of both sides were not one-tenth as effective as the sign in space. Whenever a Saturnian went outdoors, that vast name shone on him from above. Far brighter than Saturn's moons and rings, it lit up the planet at night with a soft pale radiance soothing to the eye and mind, exactly as planned by Jaxon's chemists when synthesizing the luxite. Where the light shone into windows of Saturnian houses, it was reflected from lamps and vases so that now and then they would see Ysuol's name right in their own homes.

Without cessation, that radiance and that name beat upon millions of Saturnians and, impressionable creatures that they are, soon the outcries of the Melko party lost their effect in the face of the overwhelming force of that majestic sign floating in the heavens. All the Saturnians could see, feel or think was *Ysuol, Ysuol, Ysuol!*

In the Jaxon organization on Earth, glee and joy were supreme as one Gallup poll after another arrived. From his all-time high of 84%, Melko rapidly lost ground. His percentage dropped steadily from day to day despite feverish efforts by his party to stop the ebbing tide of their strength.

TEN days before the election, Ysuol went into the lead and continued to forge rapidly ahead. When, with only one week remaining, sixty-two percent of the Saturnian electorate named him as their favorite, Jaxon at last felt sure of victory.

Summoning Willie and Joey to his office, he greeted them with the first friendly smile they'd ever seen on him. When he actually shook hands with them, they both collapsed weakly into the chairs he himself pulled out for them.

"Boys," he bubbled, beaming over every square inch of his expansive face, "we're winning. The election's over except for the bother of counting ballots. Ysuol's in and those mines are mine—Earth's, I mean. To show my appreciation, boys, here's a little gift."

He handed Willie a small envelope.

"One thousand dollars in cash, boys. Go out and have a good time. You deserve it. Come back the day after the election, boys, and when I have that contract for the mines, then we'll really celebrate!"

HALF an hour later, Willie and Joey strode breezily into McGinnity's Rum Rendezvous, tramped to the bar and slapped down a thick package of currency.

"Hey, you guys," Willie shouted to the crowd, "I'm buying for everybody. Come on, folks, this is on me!"

While the mechanical bartenders nearly suffered nervous breakdowns trying to mix drinks for everyone simultaneously, Willie beckoned to McGinnity, proprietor of the Rum Rendezvous.

"Hey, Mike, how much *trtzina* have ya got in the cellar?"

"About four barrels, I guess."

"Bring it on! Me an' Joe is gonna lap it all up. Yow!"

McGinnity shook his head dubiously. "Ain't no man alive who can take more'n three drinks of that stuff."

Willie crammed some money into McGinnity's hand and laughed. "I ain't a man alive. I'm a banshee and tonight's my night to howl! Hey, Flossie! Hey, Maisie!" he bellowed to two hostesses across the room. "Come on, you gals. You an' me an' Joey is gonna swim in *trtzina*. Bring on that *trtzina!* Don't bother with glasses, just gimme the barrel. Hahah! Yow!"

With an arm around each girl, he stumbled to a booth and dropped into the seat. And thus began the longest, wildest spree in the history of McGinnity's Rum Rendezvous, a spree still discussed in awed, respectful tones by the weaklings who can't take more than three drinks of *trtzina* in one day.

For eight days, the robot-waiters rolled back and forth, hauling a steady stream of *trtzina* to the two carousers. Each day there was a brief interruption when Willie and Joey staggered upstairs to collapse on McGinnity's bed for a few hours, from whence their snores tumbled downstairs to rattle the bottles on the shelves behind the bar. Awakening, they wobbled down to resume their noble but futile effort to exhaust McGinnity's supply of *trtzina*.

On the morning of the eighth day, Willie awoke with a headache so bad that a professional mind reader who happened to be flying by outside felt it too. As he lay moaning and pressing his eyeballs to keep them from bouncing out of his head, he heard a radio downstairs faintly announcing the news.

"With the election of Melko yesterday, Saturnian politics enters a new phase. First—"

BUT Willie lost all interest in the news beyond that first sentence. Reaching out trembling hands, he seized Joey who lay breathing a lusty rasp beside him.

"Wake up! Wake up!" Frenziedly Willie shook the unconscious form, but to no avail. Several minutes devoted to merciless punches and jabs finally produced results. Joey rolled over and distinctly said "Ahbloofzzz."

Willie continued to pound him relentlessly. "Wake up, you monkey. Quick, wake up!"

"Wassa matter?" Joey demanded drowsily, peering at his partner with one foggy eye. "Sumptin' wrong? Alla *trtzina* gone?"

"No! Listen! What's the radio sayin'?"

"Smatter? You deaf?" asked Joey, worry in his voice. "Better see a doc—

Hey, where ya goin'?"

He rolled off the bed and stumbled clumsily after Willie. When he reached the bar, Willie had McGinnity's arm in a crushing grip and was hysterically demanding, "Who got elected on Saturn?"

"Why, Melko, of course. Hey, leggo my arm!" squawked McGinnity, wriggling in pain.

"But how'd it happen?" Willie insisted, relentlessly tightening his hold. "Ysuol was way ahead last week."

"Ouch, leggo, willya? That's better. Oh, about the election. Funniest thing. Did ya read about the sign them Ysuol guys stuck up in the sky there? Well, heh heh, they put the front end on Themis and the back end on Titan. Titan is closer to Saturn, so it travels around the planet faster. Well—this will kill ya—what happens is the back end of the sign catches up and then passes the front end, so the sign gets turned around backwards. See?"

He paused, grinning.

"So what?" said Willie blankly, while a wave of fear swept up his spine.

"So just spell Ysuol's name backwards and see what you get."

Willie stared at him vacantly a moment, then his eyes widened in horror. Gulping, choking, he tried to speak but couldn't.

"Sure," chuckled McGinnity, "first the Saturnians see this here name shinin' on 'em all the time an' they get impressed an' decide to vote for him. Then what do they see for four days before the election? Ysuol turned backwards: L-O-U-S-Y. You know how fast them Saturnians change their minds, so while half of 'em are laffin' themselves sick, the rest get to thinkin' Ysuol is a louse, and comes election day, Melko gets in by a landslide. Ain't it terrific? Hey, what's wrong? Gosh!"

FOR up to now, Willie had gradually been running through all the shades of gray and purple and now, his face a delicate green, he was swaying gently back and forth. Before anyone could catch him, he leaned forward, fell flat on his face and lay inert.

McGinnity shook his head sorrowfully. "Knew too much *trtzina* would get him sooner or later. Joe, haul that carcass outside before someone trips over it."

Joe seized his partner's ankles, dragged his limp body out to the parking lane, dropped it beside their rocket plane and sat down to wait. Presently a low groan indicated that the cool morning air was reviving the unhappy Willie. Soon he sat up, looking like all the tragic fates combined. Holding his head dejectedly in his hands, he proceeded to swear softly but intensely for five minutes at a stretch, while Joey listened interestedly.

"Yeah," he commented, when Willie finally ran down, "that goes for me too."

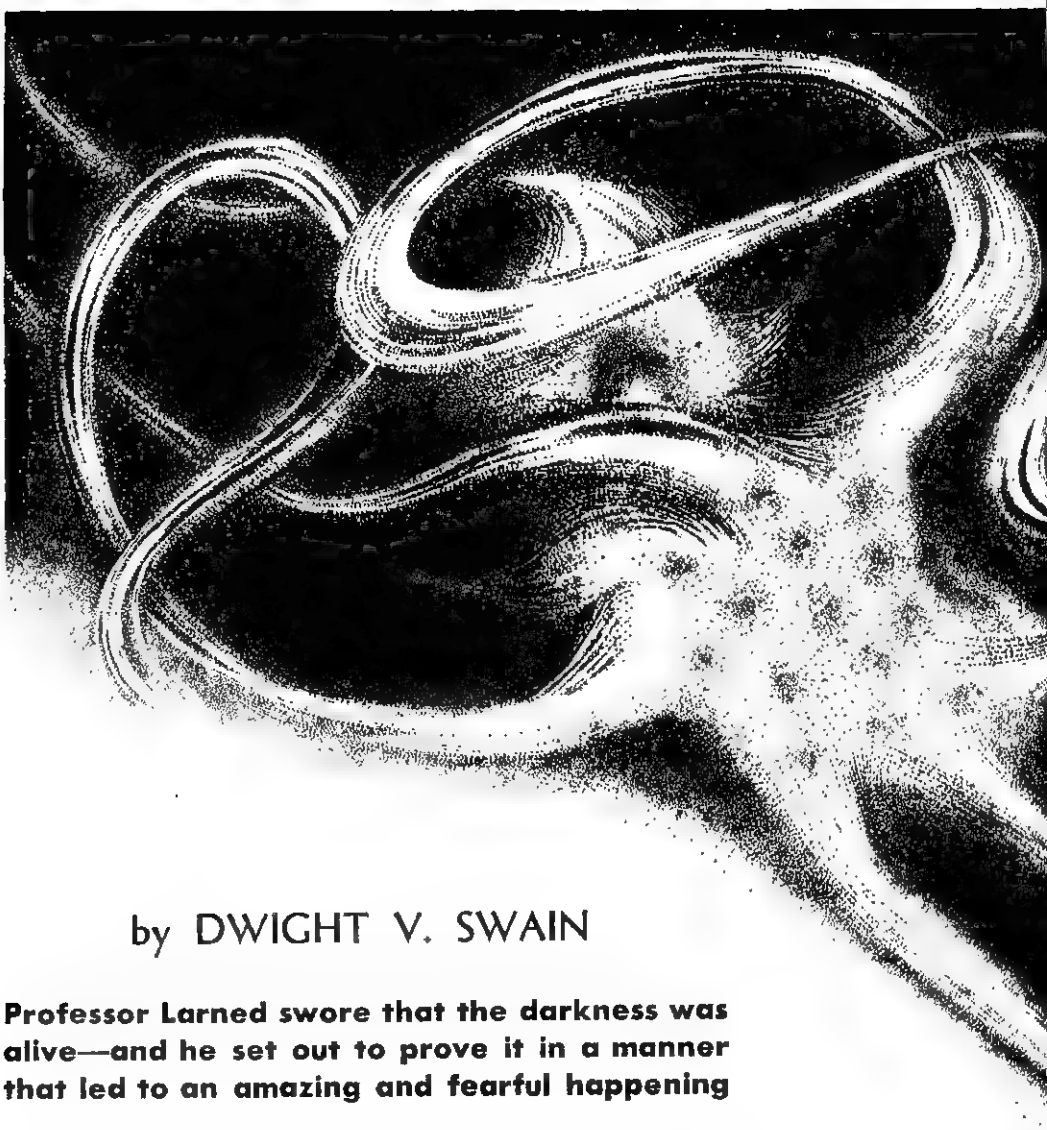
Willie carefully felt his biceps muscle, then reached out and felt Joey's. Shaking his head despondently, he muttered, "Awful soft, but after a couple of weeks in them lunar mines . . ." He sighed unhappily.

Joe nodded silently.

Willie rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I wonder . . . Should we go direct to the mines, or maybe—one chance in a million—the boss'll forgive us. Oh well, we gotta see him sooner or later, may as well make it now. Let's go."

It was a sad caravan that set out toward the Jaxon Galactic Enterprises Building. It was a much sadder one which arrived there, and the two men

(Continued on page 213)



by DWIGHT V. SWAIN

Professor Larned swore that the darkness was alive—and he set out to prove it in a manner that led to an amazing and fearful happening

"THERE'S nothing beyond your ken, is there? Nothing you don't know! Nothing your minds can't grasp!"

The gaunt savant's tongue was a fiery whiplash, his voice a jagged flame. The dark eyes smouldered dangerously; narrow shoulders shook with anger.

Doctor Fred Gordon shot a glance to his colleague. "Nyctophobia," that meaningful look said, as clearly as if he had spoken aloud. Doctor Reisinger's barely perceptible nod silently confirmed the diagnosis.

The scholar's piercing, deep-sunk eyes caught it, too—interpreted it instantly.

"Fools!" he blazed. "Blind, pompous fools!"

He erupted from his seat on the studio couch, whipped across the hardwood floor of the richly furnished, oak-paneled room with jerky, skittering steps. Whirling as he reached the other side,

The POWERS OF DARKNESS

The monster's folds swirled about him, clutching at him

he faced them: Gordon—stocky, sandy-haired, earnest, and obviously brilliant despite his youth; for he was only 30. Reisinger—plump, dark, good-natured but shrewd and clearly competent, and about 15 years older than his fellow-specialist. The gaunt man's bony, twitching fingers clenched into nervous fists.

"Your puny, spoon-fed intellects can't conceive that darkness actually is a fearsome thing!" he cried hysterically. "Can't you see that it's another dimension? Another world, alive with horrors—"

"Please, Professor Larned—"

The thin lips twisted in a quivering sneer, disregarded young Doctor Gordon's plea.

"Psychiatrists!" Loathing and contempt and impotent rage bubbled through the old man's articulation of the word. "Impudent brats playing God! With messianic complexes and delusions of grandeur!"

Again the two specialists exchanged meaningful glances. They rose to go.

"We've got to leave now, Professor Larned," Doctor Gordon apologized, dropping his pipe into his coat pocket. "There are some matters we've got to discuss with your niece and nephew—"

"But we'll be back," Doctor Reisinger broke in. "We'd like to talk over other aspects. . . ."

The professor did not even bother to answer. The sparkle of life, the peppery intensity, had gone out of him. He sat in silence on the studio couch, shoulders slumped, white hair awry, staring dully at the dark paneling of the opposite wall, the very personification of a tired and broken old man.

BOTH Barbara Larned and Rupert Hendrix were waiting when the psychiatrists came out. They got up eagerly.

"Well, gentlemen—?" d e m a n d e-d Hendrix. He was tall and well built. His clothes fitted him to perfection. Handsome in a rugged sort of way, completely poised and self-confident, it was easy to see why his reputation as a trial lawyer was so high.

Doctor Reisinger shook his head slowly. For once his dark, usually good-natured face was sober.

"I'm sorry to have to say this," he reported, "but Doctor Gordon and I are agreed that Professor Larned definitely is suffering from an extreme case of nyctophobia." He dropped his pudgy bulk into an easy chair, linked fat fingers across his stomach.

"It's so severe we're afraid it's affected your uncle's reasoning power," Doctor G o r d o n elaborated. He frowned, ran blunt fingers through his sandy hair. "He's so obsessed by his fear that his whole outlook on life is colored by it."

"But this nyctophobia—; what is it?" It was Barbara Larned speaking. Anxiety distorted the contours of her lovely face.

Young Gordon's eyes lit up approvingly as he gazed at her. "Nyctophobia," he explained, "is a morbid and uncontrollable fear of darkness."

"In your uncle's case," said Doctor Reisinger, "his terror is, to an extent, rationalized. Professor Larned insists he has discovered a world of horrors which darkness ordinarily conceals."

"But what are we to do?" Hendrix queried. "Can't we help him? Isn't there some way he can find himself again?"

"It's possible he can be cured," admitted Doctor Reisinger. "New techniques constantly are being developed—"

"Then what's the first step?" the lawyer pressed eagerly. "Forget about the cost. Just tell me what to do."

"The best thing, I believe, would be to place your uncle in a private sanitarium," the doctor stated, his dark face grave.

"He can receive proper care and treatment that way," his colleague added. "A controlled environment brings best results."

There was a moment of dead silence as the psychiatrists' voices died away. Then Barbara Larned's slim hand shot out.

Crack!

Rupert Hendrix reeled. He gasped in pain and surprise. "What—!"

Crack!

Again the girl struck. She slapped the left side of Hendrix's face as resoundingly as she had the right.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

Both hands flashed now. Hendrix backed away from her, stumbling in his haste. Vainly he tried to shield his fast-reddening face from the sting of her attack. She pursued him, a lovely, auburn-haired fury.

"Stop her!" the lawyer shouted, failing in another effort to snare her wrists.

DOCTOR GORDON sprang to Hendrix's rescue. Keeping behind the girl, the young specialist closed in, then suddenly caught her arms. She fought desperately to escape, writhing and jerking with all the strength of her lithe young body.

But in the end—although he was hard put to hold on for a few moments—the stocky doctor's superior weight gave him the victory. Panting and trembling with exertion, the slim girl ceased to struggle. She lay passive in the psychiatrist's arms.

Suddenly, as he held her thus, the girl's nearness swept over Gordon like a swift-rushing wave. He became acutely conscious of the warmth of her ripe, youthful body gripped against his; of the softness, the desirability of her as she relaxed against the pressure of his arms. The faint fragrance of her shimmering, dark auburn hair was an aphrodisiac in his nostrils. A sort of giddiness assailed him. It was only with conscious effort that he fought down an urge to crush her to him without restraint.

"If you'll promise not to fight Hendrix again, I'll let you go," he proposed hastily. There were beads of sweat on his broad forehead. His voice was a trifle unsteady.

For a moment she said nothing, and he thought she was going to refuse. Then:

"All right. For now, anyhow."

Gordon released her. Across the room, Hendrix, readjusting his tie, moved a step further away and kept a wary eye on the girl.

Free now, she turned to face them. Defiance still sparkled in her eyes. They were green eyes, Gordon noted, the cool, fathomless green of deep, clear water. Her slender hands moved to straighten her soft, curve-accentuating sweater suit, disarranged in the scuffle. There were tears in her eyes and in her voice when she spoke.

"It must be a great satisfaction to you gentlemen"—she was addressing the two doctors—"to k n o w you've helped Rupert achieve his life's ambition of having my uncle declared insane. Uncle Mace is a harmless, peaceful old man who never hurt anyone—but because he's eccentric and has a few strange ideas, you'll testify he's incompetent. You'll put him in an asylum where he'll be given 'proper care and treatment.' And the shock and shame of it will kill him."

"Please, my dear Barbara!" Hendrix protested. "You don't know what you're saying—"

She turned the flame of her contempt

upon him. Half-sobbing now, she hardly could talk understandably.

"And you!" she choked. "Money must mean a lot to you! You'd put Uncle Mace away in an asylum, just so you can have what little money he's saved—" Her voice broke. She flung herself, still sobbing, onto a sofa.

HENDRIX addressed the psychiatrists: "Barbara always has been very attached to Uncle Mace," he explained. "Now her emotions just won't let her believe I'm trying to help him. She's got some strange idea that I'm trying to have him committed to an institution in order that I, personally, may profit." He lowered his voice. "Actually, if Uncle Mace were to die tomorrow, his funeral would cost me money. He's never carried any insurance, and this property has been mortgaged to the hilt for years."

"How long has he been in his present condition?" Doctor Gordon inquired.

"He first told me about his fear of darkness about a month ago. He kept talking about some mysterious experiments he'd made which proved him right."

Doctor Reisinger nodded. "Same story he gave us. But when we asked him to produce some concrete evidence —his notes, or even a general description of what he'd done—he turned secretive on us and said what he'd learned was too dangerous for the world to know."

"That was my experience, too," agreed Hendrix. He shook his head regretfully. "He was a fine old man. I hate to think of him being confined. . . ."

Doctor Gordon rose. "Come on, Kurt," he urged Doctor Reisinger. "This phobia of Professor Larned's interests me. I'd like to have another talk with him."

"Right," agreed his colleague. He opened the door to the room in which they had left the savant. Together the psychiatrists entered.

The room was empty!

"What—!" gasped the astounded Doctor Gordon. He stared about incredulously, eyes wide. "But he *couldn't* have gotten out. There's only one door, and—"

"Behind you!" bellowed Doctor Reisinger. "Stop him!"

Gordon spun about. The professor had just jumped from behind the door. Now he was sprinting across the room beyond. The young doctor lunged after him.

Hendrix, too, sprang up to bar the scientist's passage. Nimbly, for all his years, the white-haired scholar sidestepped. Body bent low as he ran, his shoulder smashed into his nephew's stomach. Thrown off balance, the younger man crashed to the floor.

Leaping across Hendrix's prone form, Gordon closed on Professor Larned as the latter reached the doorway leading from the room. The doctor reached for his prey.

But before he could grasp the other's shoulders, something struck his legs from behind, jerked them out from under him. He pitched flat on his face on the carpet, half-stunned by the force of his fall. Vaguely he heard Doctor Reisinger yelling for him to hurry, then rush past him in panting pursuit of the elusive professor.

Another voice impinged on his consciousness, this time that of Barbara Larned.

"You'll never catch him now!" she cried jubilantly. "He's gotten too much of a start."

DAZEDLY, Gordon sat up, discovered the girl sprawled on the floor next to him. Suddenly he realized what

had knocked him down.

"Whose football team did you play on, to learn to tackle like that?" he grunted.

The green eyes were sparkling with triumph and excitement, but before the girl could speak, from somewhere within the house came a faint cry for help. Together Gordon and his adversary scrambled to their feet. Hendrix already was up.

"That's Kurt Reisinger!" snapped the psychiatrist. He ran from the room, the others close at his heels.

They found Doctor Reisinger in the cellar, clinging to the knob of a heavy door and panting with exertion.

"Help me!" he gasped frantically. "The professor's in there. He's trying to get this door shut so he can lock it. If he makes it, no telling what he'll do. Hurry!"

"Here, let me at it," commanded Gordon. He squeezed in beside his colleague, gripped the knob.

The next instant Barbara crashed into them, clawing, hitting, kicking. For a moment the two doctors were thrown off balance. Then the girl was gone again.

"Hurry up, you two!" came Hendrix's muffled voice. "I don't know how long I can hold this hell-cat."

But before the two psychiatrists could set themselves for a concerted pull, the heavy door burst open. They staggered with the abruptness of it, then surged forward.

Beyond the doorway loomed a room easily 30 feet square. An indirect lighting system in the walls close to the ceiling illuminated it brilliantly. In the room's center two concrete piers half-encased giant coils. They were nearly five feet high, and strangely similar to miniature cyclotrons. They stood about five feet apart, joined by a metal bar approximately two inches in diameter which set in sockets protruding from the top of the concrete casements.

But, to the doctors, the room itself was incidental. Their eyes were centered on the gaunt, white-haired figure of Professor Larned, standing at the far end of the chamber, close to a huge instrument panel and control board mounted on two skeleton legs a few feet to one side of the coils.

"Get him!" snapped Doctor Gordon. He and Reisinger plunged forward. Simultaneously the professor's bony hand flashed up to one of the switches on the panel and threw it over.

Like a thunderclap the room went black. The two medical men halted abruptly.

"What's the matter, gentlemen?" came Professor Larned's mocking voice from the somehow sinister blackness beyond them. "Surely you're not afraid of the dark?" A laugh. "And you diagnosed *me* as having nyctophobia!" He sounded close, within a few feet of where they stood.

GORDON'S face went hot at the savant's gibes. "You might as well give up, Professor," he warned, trying to keep his tone calm and even. "We'll find you sooner or later. There's only one door out of here, and Hendrix is guarding it."

Another mocking laugh was his only answer. The doctor halted, tried to place the sound. He could hear his fat colleague wheezing for breath in the darkness beside him. Slowly, he turned, endeavoring vainly to locate the professor. Behind him lay the oblong of yellow light that marked the doorway. And even as he watched, the door swung shut. The last vestige of light within the chamber was blotted out. He shivered with a sudden chill of fear.

"Come, come, Professor, be reasonable," Doctor Reisinger's voice urged persuasively. "Why not accept the situation as it is—"

A sudden roar drowned out his words.

"Engines!" grated Gordon. The tumult swallowed his exclamation. He stood tense in the blackness, every nerve on edge, cold sweat beading his forehead. A gigantic question mark seared its way across his mind.

"What's going on?" he muttered aloud, forgetting that not even he could hear. "What's it for?"

Then, as abruptly as it had started, the engines' thunder stopped. Utter silence prevailed. Silence so dead and empty that every breath was like the rush of the south wind through the pines. Another chill rippled down Gordon's spine. He was afraid. He made a desperate, unconscious effort to hold his breath—to silence even that disruption of the all-enveloping quiet.

Doctor Reisinger's voice broke through, injecting a welcome note of half-amused reality into the situation's tenseness.

"Well, Fred, what are you waiting for?" he demanded good-naturedly. "You're always loaded down with kitchen matches to light that foul-smelling pipe of yours. Put one of them to some practical use. Give us some light."

"Yes, Doctor Gordon," jeered Professor Larned, "do light a match. Illuminate the situation."

"Hurry up, Fred. Give us that light," Doctor Reisinger broke in again. A note of impatience, of strain, now undertoned even his voice.

But Doctor Frederick Gordon was standing alone in the blackness, staring dumbly at the spot where his hand should be. He was trembling like a frightened child. Cold horror was sending successive snakey tentacles up and down his spine. He had struck that match—struck it a full minute before. He had waited expectantly for the flash of welcome light as the tip flared. He had waited—and nothing had happened! At first, it had occurred to him that the match had broken instead of igniting. That he held only a portion of the stick. Then, even as he thought of it, flame seared his fingers—*flame he could not see!*

"Fred!" bellowed Doctor Reisinger. "Fred! Where are you?"

IT JARRED the younger man from his stunned silence. "I'm here," he retorted, struggling to keep the panic from his tone. "I'm here, and I struck a match. It burned, but there wasn't any light."

"There wasn't any light?" Incredulity tinged the other's voice. "Do you know what you're saying, Fred?"

"Indeed he does, Doctor Reisinger's, indeed he does," interpolated Professor Larned. "An interesting phenomenon, isn't it?"

From the blackness, at the sound of the professor's voice, came a little scream of fear.

"Barbara!" There was a note of panic in the scientist's exclamation.

"What are you doing, Uncle Mace?" the girl cried. "Don't you see you're playing into these men's hands? I wanted you to get away. But if you do anything to these doctors, you'll surely be sent to an asylum."

The other disregarded her words. "How did you get in here, Barbara?" he demanded.

Hendrix answered: "I dragged her in. I wasn't going to stand out there in the bright light of the cellar where you could take a pot-shot at me from this room."

A vague mumbling by the professor was the lawyer's only response. Barbara Larned broke in again.

"Why can't we see?" she cried half-hysterically. "What's happened to us?" She stopped suddenly, gasped in horror. "We're *blind!*" she shrieked. "That's why we keep thinking it's dark. Oh, Uncle Mace! Please—"

"You are not blind," her relative contradicted wearily. "None of you are. But we are in another world—a world in which, except under very exceptional circumstances, the light rays of our world somehow are filtered out. The how or why of it I still don't understand."

Doctor Reisinger's voice slashed through the darkness.

"You're mad!" he exploded. "Everything you say or do is twisted and distorted by this phobia of yours. You keep talking about light and darkness. Yet darkness is nothing but an absence of light."

"And what," demanded the professor, a note of triumph creeping into his tone, "is light?"

"Light?" The doctor sounded puzzled. "Light?" he repeated again. "Why, it's . . . well, I guess it's the ray product of certain waves of electrical energy."

"And that's all you can say!" cried Professor Larned exultantly. "Oh, you can drag in a hundred theses and theories and hypotheses, and you can argue for a year, but neither you nor science ever have gotten much closer to light's fundamental character than that, crudely as you've phrased it. Yet, blissful in your colossal ignorance, you have the nerve, the unbelievable gall, to stand there unblushingly, throwing such glittering, meaningless generalities as 'darkness is nothing but an absence of light' at me." He sneered contemptuously. "As definitive and as useful as describing pneumonia or bubonic plague simply as an absence of good health."

"Stop it!" commanded Hendrix. "This bickering isn't accomplishing anything. It can only lead to panic in the long run."

"Not worried, are you, nephew?" jibed the scientist. "Not touched by nyctophobia?"

THE lawyer did not deign to answer, but Doctor Reisinger broke in again.

"There's a way out of this problem," he declared. "It's so simple I don't see why we didn't think of it before. I'm going over to the wall. I'll follow it until I reach the door. Then we can open it and get out of this private chamber of horrors."

Professor Larned laughed mirthlessly.

Slap slap slap. Doctor Reisinger's footsteps echoed in the stillness as he groped his way wallward. They faded slowly. Died away. Ten seconds. Twenty. Thirty. Then, as from afar, a shout. Terror was in it; bridled, to be sure, but still there.

"I can't find the wall! I keep going, but I can't find it! Where are you? Answer me! Answer me!"

Gordon responded: "This way, Kurt. Follow the sound of my voice. This way. Here we are . . ."

The professor spoke again, his voice dull and monotonous, as if he were back in a university classroom. "He didn't understand," he explained. "He thought I was crazy. He didn't realize that we've passed that line of demarcation where walls are any barrier. We're in another world, gentlemen! Another world, where most of the things we know aren't true, and where our world's impossibilties come to life." He chuckled a little, delighted with his own phrase-making.

"Damn you, Larned—" It was the elder psychiatrist's voice; it sounded close at hand now. He was wheezing a little with exertion.

"And even if there'd been a door, it wouldn't have done you any good," Professor Larned went on. "That door's electrically operated. You saw it open and close without my touching it. You couldn't budge it if someone wasn't at the control board."

"Then you'll operate it for us!" thundered the doctor. "You'll return us to our own world if I have to strangle you with my own hands!" There was a rush of footsteps toward the scholar.

"No!" cried the savant. His feet shuffled into motion. But only for a moment. A thud followed.

"Uncle Mace!" screamed Barbara.

"Oh, I'm quite all right," came the oldster's reply.

GORDON stumbled forward. "Kurt —!" he called.

"I didn't even touch him," snapped the professor. "He fell. He's here on the floor beside me. The same thing happened to him which will happen to all of you in a few minutes if you're not careful. The darkness here is so intense it destroys one's sense of balance. We have no standard by which to judge whether we are standing upright or not. So, ultimately, we fall down. Especially if we make any sudden moves." He was silent for a moment. Then: "I've felt of his head. He's got a bad bump, but apparently that's all. He's breathing normally, and his pulse is regular. Apparently he's just stunned."

Suddenly Gordon interrupted. "Is it my eyes," he demanded, "or do I see a light?"

Strained silence. Then:

"It's a light," said Hendrix, "but not like anything I've ever seen before."

The thing was a pin-point at first, a strange, glowing pin-point. Then it seemed either to come closer or to enlarge, or both; the darkness that surrounded them was too thick to tell which for sure.

Gordon felt little premonitory prickles of fear stab at his heart. The creature—if creature it was—reminded him of a monstrous, luminescent amoeba, floating in the air as its original floats in the water of a stagnant pond. Finger-like projections seemed to aid it in traveling. Wriggling, they darted out in all directions, groping through the air about it. Chameleon-like, it was at once all colors and none. It stood out in the darkness in multi-hued brilliance. The young doctor searched his brain for some standard of comparison. The only one he could find was from his own childhood, when he had closed his eyes tightly, then pressed his fingers hard against the eyeballs until a display vaguely like this one shimmered in his brain.

Something brushed against him. He jerked from his momentary reverie. To his intense amazement, he discovered he could see once again, even though but faintly. The huge, shining figure before them had cast a faint, weird, gray illumination over the entire scene.

Close beside him stood Barbara Larned. Lines of strain marred the beauty of her lovely face. Even in the semi-darkness she seemed pale.

"What is it?" she whispered tensely, eyes riveted on the strange entity that confronted them.

Gordon moved closer, gripped her shoulders. He could feel them tremble beneath his touch.

"I don't know. It's beyond me. It doesn't fit into any categories. . . ."

Professor Larned laughed unpleasantly.

"That thing hovering there is one of the reasons I'm afraid of the dark," he

commented caustically. He bowed elaborately to the psychiatrist. "Nyctophobia, of course."

Gordon frowned. "You mean—?"

"I mean, young man, that this colorful monstrosity is a minor sample of the horrors inhabiting this world of darkness," the savant answered curtly. "Before you're through, you'll realize why the ancients classed all evil as the work of what they so aptly termed 'the Powers of Darkness.' You'll understand why children, gifted with some atavistic seventh sense, scream in terror when they're placed in a dark room."

SUDDENLY he pointed. "There! And there! There! There! See them? They're gathering now!"

The others' eyes followed the lead of his quivering forefinger. Other pinpoints were beginning to dot the blackness, all converging on the little group.

"What are they?" demanded Gordon. "What do they do?"

Professor Larned ran a bony hand through his wispy white hair. "They're not thinking creatures," he confided. "Probably they merely exist. So far as I know, they have but one characteristic."

"Well?"

"An insatiable appetite for human life. Or, if that isn't available, for any other kind."

Barbara Larned gave a little gasp of horror.

"They suck up life very much as you or I would suck liquid through a straw," the scientist continued. "They enfold the living, and when they depart the living are dead."

The young psychiatrist stared at him. "And, you say, they are everywhere where there's darkness?"

"Yes. Not that they can always strike, of course. They are creatures of another world, another dimension. Only when the conditions are right can they invade ours. That is very seldom. Yet the thought of it, remote as are the possibilities of its happening to me, have been enough to make me what you so profoundly term a nyctophobiac."

"But surely doctors would recognize—"

"Laboratory animals left in this room died within a few seconds after these creatures touched them," the professor retorted. "Cause of death was not ascertainable. And as for doctors and post mortems—," he shrugged, "heart failure is such a convenient term when you're filling out a death certificate."

"But why? There must be some reason—"

"There is. The same amount of reason there is for a sheep dog's suddenly acquiring a taste for mutton and killing off an entire flock wantonly."

"They're coming closer," whispered Barbara. She gripped Gordon's arm. "They keep closing in on us."

There was something menacing about that glowing, narrowing circle. The doctor watched it nervously.

"What about it?" he probed. "Can these things be driven away?"

The scientist nodded. "Yes, of course. They fear light. But, in this strange world of theirs, it takes a tremendously brilliant flash even to be visible or to have any effect on them, while in ours any chance ray will disperse them." He sighed wearily. "Not that we need worry about that. I had planned to let them get the three of us —you, Doctor Reisinger, and myself. I thought it would be poetic justice, as it were—to have you, who believed me mad because I feared darkness, die the victims of these creatures of darkness.

"Then my nephew brought Barbara here, too. I knew then that I couldn't go through with it. You I didn't care about. But Barbara—she doesn't de-

serve such a fate." He shook his head. "No. We'll go back. And if you still feel I'm a nyctophobiac, I won't argue about your judgment in having me committed to an institution." He turned slowly. The tenseness and strain had left his face. The fierceness was gone, too. All that remained was an old man —tired, broken, too long on Earth. "Come on," he said, and led the way quietly to the control panel a few feet away. He began twisting dials, adjusting pointers.

Suddenly Gordon remembered.

"Kurt!" he cried.

DOCTOR REISINGER was struggling to his feet, a bewildered look on his fat face. He was at least twenty feet from them.

"What happened?" he mumbled, staring at them. "Who hit me. . . .?"

"Kurt! Run!" screamed Gordon. He sprang forward.

The other saw him, recognized the horror written on Gordon's face. Even then he might have made it. But he hesitated long enough to glance back, over his shoulder, to see what he was fleeing. Like a cloud, the glowing entity of death swept down, reaching for him with hungry, clutching fingers. The psychiatrist's jaw dropped. Stark terror struggled with unbelief and amazement in his black eyes. He started to run. The fat legs took two steps. But the thing behind him moved faster. The shining folds were almost touching him. The doctor stumbled. His feet flew out from under him. He pitched to the floor. The monster pursuing dropped over him like a cloak, enveloping him. It swirled about his body in a radiant fog.

Gordon struggled against Barbara Larned's restraining arms.

"Let go!" he roared, trying to throw her aside. Still she clung to him.

"Don't!" she cried. "Can't you see? You can't do anything for him now. It's suicide."

Before he could free himself the creature which had swept over Doctor Reisinger was moving again. Back, this time. Away from the doctor.

Gordon dropped to one knee beside his friend. With fingers that trembled he took the pulse.

"Kurt!" he choked. He let the other's arm fall.

"You killed him, you old fool! You killed him!"

It was Hendrix. His hand shot out, caught Professor Larned by the shoulder. His right hand balled into a fist, smashed into the old man's jaw with every ounce of his weight behind it. The savant literally was lifted off the floor. He spun backward through the air, struck the floor with terrific impact. Hendrix lunged toward him, started to jerk his limp body from where it had fallen.

Gordon jumped between them, forced the lawyer back.

"Let him alone!" he ordered.

"Reisinger wouldn't be dead if that old fool hadn't brought us into this madhouse," roared Hendrix. He shoved the young psychiatrist aside, started forward again. Gordon's foot shot out, tripped the lawyer. His fist whipped up in a savage blow. Hendrix's head jerked back with the force of it. Then his knees buckled under him and he, too, slumped to the floor.

THE doctor turned to the limp-sprawled scientist, his face white. Barbara joined him in anxious consultation.

'How is he, Fred?" she whispered fearfully.

"Not too good," he admitted grimly. "That was an awful wallop for a man his age to absorb. And the worst part

of it is that there's so damned little I can do about it." He ran blunt fingers through his sandy hair. His broad face was grave. "Hendrix must have been mad," he muttered. "Professor Larned was our only chance of getting out of this mess in one piece. God knows how long it'll be before he's conscious again. I'm afraid he's got a concussion."

The girl stared up at him wide-eyed. Her breath was coming too fast.

"But what about *them?*" she asked shakily. "Will *they* wait?"

Gordon's eyes followed the motion of her hand. He watched the narrowing circle of luminescent forms grimly for a moment. Then he shrugged. "I don't know," he said bluntly. "Maybe we're done right now. Maybe they're getting set to rush us."

Barabara gave a little cry of terror. "They're like wolves," she whispered. "They hang there, waiting. . . ." She clung to Gordon like a frightened child, her body warm against his. Almost unconsciously his own arms enfolded her. His blunt fingers caressed her auburn hair.

Then, suddenly, he pushed her away. In two quick steps he reached the control board. He fumbled with the dials, trying frantically to determine their purpose and meaning. He threw first one switch, then another.

Nothing happened.

"It's no use," he exploded. "I can't make head nor tail of it. We can't do a thing 'till the professor comes to."

He crossed to where the old man lay, again tried the feeble pulse. To the wordless question in Barbara's eyes he shook his head. "No luck. He's hanging in a coma. There's nothing I can do to revive him. Not without medical supplies."

The glowing circle was growing smaller.

"There must be something." There was desperation in the psychiatrist's voice. Like a caged lion he paced the floor. "If only we could fight them off. . . ." He stopped beside the coils. His eyes riveted on the heavy bar joining the two. For a moment he hesitated. Then, whipping out his pocket knife, he galvanized into action, twisting with the knife blade at the setscrews which held the bar solidly in the socket atop each coil.

Barbara watched him. "What good can that do?" she asked wearily. "You can't attack monsters like these with a club. They look like vapor. You'll strike right through them—"

"I don't care. But I won't stand here doing nothing while they wipe us out." He wrenched the bar from the sockets. Even as he did so he could see the shimmering wall of death around them move forward slowly, like that moment when a wave seems almost to stand still, just before it breaks over all in its path.

THERE was a silvery luster to the metal where the setscrews had gouged it. The bar was light in his grip. Gordon stared at it. Sudden hope dawned in his eyes. He picked up the knife again and slashed at the bar. A long, silvery ribbon peeled away as the blade bit into the metal.

All about them luminescent forms crept forward, hemming them in. Gordon thought of tigers crouched and ready to spring. Tigers whose eyes glowed in the night.

He turned, the metal shaving held between thumb and forefinger of his left hand. With his right he fumbled in his coat pocket for a match. He lit it, let the flame play on the metal.

"What are you doing?" probed Barbara nervously. "What is it?"

"I'm not sure. But maybe—"

So fast his fingers almost burned before he could let go, the metal burst

into a dazzling purple flame.

"Fred!" gasped Barbara. "Fred! You've done it! You've found light!" Her eyes were shining with new hope.

But all about them the creatures of the darkness moved closer.

Gordon hacked savagely at the bar with his knife, prying loose a chunk of the metal, then another and another. He frayed ribbons from one side of each chunk, leaving them still clinging, fuses to ignite the lump itself.

"Fred—they're coming!"

Grimly, Gordon glanced up. There, like a strange, luminescent wave, the shining monsters moved forward. Slowly, at first. Then faster. At last like an incoming tide of shimmering horror. This was it. This was the kill.

The doctor stabbed the point of the knife blade into one of the soft metal lumps. He scratched another match, held the invisible flame close against the dragging metal ribbons. They ignited. In an instant the entire lump was a fiery purple beacon. Gordon whipped the knife around sharply. The flaring metal flew from the blade, straight into the fog of luminescent figures that swarmed toward them. The creatures of the darkness rolled back.

Already the psychiatrist was lighting another of the lumps, hurling it. Strips of it flew in all directions. And on every side the wave of shining death retreated before the light and flame.

"They're gone!" It was Barbara.

"They'll be back," snapped Gordon. "They'll be back—and maybe next time a handful of magnesium won't be enough to drive them off." Grimly, he prepared more lumps of the metal for lighting. "Magnesium," he added laconically, "is the same stuff they use for photographic flash powder. Usually it burns with a white flame. Here things are different. It burns purple."

"Ohhhh."

THE girl and the doctor whirled. Hendrix was sitting up, one hand clasped to his jaw, the other braced against the floor to keep him from falling over again. He was moaning piteously. Gordon helped the lawyer to his feet.

"Sorry," he apologized, "but I had to hit you. You'd have killed the professor—"

But Hendrix was staring at the remains of the bar.

"What have you done?" he exploded. "Without that apparatus intact we can't get back. . . ."

"Dead, we'd have been unable to use the apparatus," snapped Gordon. "By hacking up that magnesium, we gained a few minutes more of life—"

"Fred!"

Both Hendrix and Gordon turned to Barbara Larned. She knelt beside her uncle. "He's coming to," she whispered.

A low moan escaped the white-haired scientist's lips.

"Uncle Mace!" cried the girl. Tears streamed down her face.

Very slowly, the old man opened his eyes and stared up at her.

"Barbara, my dear—" His tone was tender. Feebly he lifted his bony hand, patted hers gently. Then he saw Hendrix and Gordon. He struggled to sit up. Gordon pushed him back gently.

"Take it easy, Professor," he warned. "That was quite a bump you got. We don't want you trying to move around too soon."

A shudder ran through the savant's thin form. "But the things," he whispered, "the creatures of the darkness? Where are they? Why haven't they? Why haven't they come—?"

"They have come," reported the doctor bluntly. "They've come, and they nearly got us all, but we drove them off with light."

The professor's eyes widened.

"Drove them off with light? But how?"

"We hacked up the bar of magnesium that separated those two big coils, lit the pieces, and threw it at them."

For a moment the scientist lay in stunned silence. A world of horror crawled through his voice when at last he spoke.

"Then we're trapped," he said hoarsely. "We can't return to our own dimension. We're doomed to stay here . . . with *them*. . . ."

The psychiatrist nodded, eyes sombre. "I had it figured that way myself, Professor Larned," he said quietly, "but there was no other way. We couldn't wait for you to regain consciousness. We had to fight them off according to their schedule, not ours."

"Maybe the spark will jump the gap," suggested Hendrix eagerly. "Try it, anyhow. Try anything now."

The savant nodded. "Yes. Try anything, now." He shook his head hopelessly. "But I can tell you in advance it'll do no good. Not with magnesium points, and such a wide gap." He tottered over to the switchboard, adjusted dials to exact positions. It was a delicate job. With the retreat of the glowing horrors, the little group had been left in almost total darkness.

"I selected magnesium as the most efficient substance for this job," Professor Larned rambled on, fingers twitching nervously as he fiddled with the controls. "I found its combination of conduction and diamagnetism gave by far the best results of anything I could find."

Adjustments completed, he threw two big switches—nothing happened.

"You see?" The professor laughed harshly, discordantly. "We're through, gentlemen. We haven't got a chance."

GORDON'S brows were knitted in a frown. Thoughtfully he smoothed his sandy hair. Then he again addressed the aged scholar: "Look, Professor, isn't it possible that something beside magnesium might turn the trick? Surely there's some other conductor which will carry the current between those two coils."

The professor nodded gloomily. "Of course there is," he agreed. "Plenty of them. Oh, they wouldn't do for permanent use, and they'd probably end up by burning out my entire machine, but they'd hold up long enough to return us to our own world."

"Then what are we waiting for?" demanded Hendrix. He turned, his eyes probing everywhere.

"You see?" the professor laughed mirthlessly. "We could use some other conductor—and we haven't got one. I've been racking my brain ever since I recovered consciousness, and I can assure you there's nothing we can use."

Now Gordon broke in again: "Professor Larned, isn't magnesium malleable and ductile?" he demanded.

"Malleable? Ductile?" The scientist frowned, his deep-sunk eyes betraying puzzlement. "Why, yes, but—"

"Then we've got a chance!" snapped the young psychiatrist. "We haven't used all the magnesium by any means. We'll stick a couple of inches in each socket to insure good connections there, then hammer the rest into a thinner strip long enough to bridge the gap. It won't make much of a connection, but it'll be good enough—I hope—to get us back!"

A tiny spark of hope lit up in the other's eyes. "Probably it will burn out before we pass to our own dimension," he argued, "but"—and the spark flamed brighter—"it's a chance. We'll try it."

Feverishly they collected the larger chunks of metal and began hammering them out against each other and the concrete coil bases, then twisting the

strips to form a longer rope of metal.

The loose-linked rod grew longer. One foot. Two feet. Three.

"We're going to make it!" cried Gordon, eyes alight. "Another six inches and it'll be long enough to close the gap."

In their enthusiasm they did not notice the change slowly transforming their surroundings. It was growing lighter minute by minute. Lighter, with the horrible, unclean luminescence of those creatures of the darkness closing in. Then—

"Look out!"

At the sound of Barbara's terrified warning cry Gordon and Hendrix came to their feet as one man. A whirling cloud of evanescent mist was swirling down upon them like a breath from hell itself.

HENDRIX moved like a striking cobra. Professor Larned, close beside him, was struggling to his feet. The lawyer caught the savant's shoulder, gave him a terrific shove that carried the white-haired scientist squarely into the path of the oncoming segment of death. The shining mist closed around the old man like a cloak. For a moment his face, horror-distraught, was limned against the cold background of shimmering light. Then that, too, disappeared, his cry of terror choked off before it left his throat.

Hendrix was still moving. He sprang now toward Barbara. Before she could move he had gripped her, was hurtling her forward as another sacrifice to the monsters of the night. He turned then on Gordon.

But the psychiatrist's foot already was shooting out. His heel caught the lawyer on the kneecap. Hendrix went down. Gordon pivoted. Barbara Larned lay sprawled on the floor where she had fallen, mere feet from the spot where death's minions hovered over her uncle. She was limp, helpless.

Gordon's hand flashed to his pocket, came out with half-a-dozen matches. He caught up the nearly-completed rope of magnesium, scratched the matches, held them close against the metal. It flamed, a glowing ball of purple fire against the pale background of luminescent sheen. The young doctor sprang forward, the magnesium held sword-like before him, into the very arms of the horror now hovering close to the girl's head. Momentarily the creature swirled forward to enfold him, too. Then it was retreating, swerving away from fiery blade, back toward the outer darkness, leaving the limp body of Professor Larned behind it. Gordon hurled what little of the metal strip that remained after it.

He paused for only a moment beside the fallen scientist. Here there was nothing he could do. The scientist, his face still contorted with fear, was dead. Gordon turned to Barbara, caught her in his arms.

Slowly her eyes focussed on him. A faint, contented sigh escaped her lips. Ever so slightly she smiled. Gordon felt the tenseness go out of her. She relaxed in his arms, her auburn hair cascading over the arm that supported her. He raised her to a sitting position. Still she clung to him.

"Don't ever let me go!" she whispered.

The psychiatrist gripped her tighter. "Never," he answered. It was a promise.

Then, as he held her thus, it came to him: He had saved her life, and now the three of them—Hendrix, Barbara, and himself—must die. The magnesium was gone. This time there was no makeshift solution. They would have to stay here. And then, sooner or later, the creatures of the darkness

would come again. This time there would be no defense. . . .

"Get up," said Hendrix.

GORDON stared up at the lawyer. Hendrix's eyes were narrowed to mere slits. The muscles of his jaw stood out. There was a tight look about his face. And theer was a .38 Colt Bankers' Special in his right hand. It was aimed at the psychiatrist's head. Slowly Gordon rose.

"Back up."

The young doctor moved away, pressed back by the menace of that snub-nosed gun. As Gordon retreated, Hendrix came forward until he reached the girl. Her eyes were wide with fear now. Without taking his eyes from Gordon, the lawyer reached down with his left hand and jerked Barbara to her feet. He held her tight against him, his left arm around her waist.

"It doesn't make sense, Hendrix," Gordon said quietly. "If we were going to get out of this alive, I could understand this show-down. But when we're going to die anyway"—he shrugged—"why bother?"

"What do you mean?" demanded the lawyer. "Why would there be a show-down if we were going to get out of here?"

Gordon laughed mirthlessly. "My business is understanding how peoples' minds work, Hendrix," he retorted. "Your sanctimonious act didn't fool me. There was no need of your uncle's being committed to an asylum in the first place. He was harmless enough, and normal save for his phobia. To cure him, of course, we'd have had to institutionalize him temporarily, but I couldn't quite picture you being willing to spend money on him unless it was absolutely essential."

"Considering your diagnosis of my uncle as being afflicted with nyctophobia, I can't say your analysis of my own character interests me greatly."

"The real give-away, though," Gordon went on as if he had not been interrupted, "was when you dragged Barbara into this room when your uncle turned out the lights. You weren't doing it in order to avoid being shot at. You wanted to see just what was going to happen. My bet is that you discovered Professor Larned's secret notes on his experiments. You decided to make use of them yourself. So you arranged to have him examined by Doctor Reisinger and me, knowing that his actions duplicated those of a nyctophobiac. You thought that we'd cooperate with you in having him committed. Then you could go ahead with whatever schemes you had in mind.

"When the professor took refuge in this room, you came along to investigate his work still further. You brought Barbara with you as life insurance. You knew he wouldn't take any chances with her present. Besides, you had that revolver of yours for emergency use.

"All the way through you've played a clever game. You never got panic-stricken, because you knew what was coming next. You knocked Professor Larned out the first time because you felt competent to run things yourself. If I hadn't knocked you out, too—that's one thing that wasn't part of your plans—, you'd have figured out a way to return to our world alone, leaving all of us behind, no doubt. Some clever little trick like that one of shoving the professor and Barbara where they could be seized and killed by those monstrosities that infest this world."

THE lawyer smiled bleakly. "Let me congratulate you, Doctor Gordon," he commented. "Since you've

figured so much out, I'll fill in the picture for you: It occurred to me when Uncle Mace first began babbling about the horrors of darkness that he might have discovered something. I searched his notes, found out everything. I decided it would be an excellent opportunity to take care of certain old enemies of mine. Perhaps even to make some money. I saw that it would be relatively simple to aid a few of these creatures we've seen so much of tonight to break through into our world on a permanent basis, where I could use them as I mentioned." He stopped abruptly. "However, that's neither here nor there. The important thing right now is for me to return to our world myself."

Gordon surveyed the man before him with professional interest.

"Do you realize what you're saying, Hendrix?" he demanded. "After we've been forced to admit we couldn't complete the circuit necessary to carry us back, you suddenly declare you're going back anyhow. Are you mad?"

Hendrix's sneer was a masterpiece. "Hardly. I've got one ace left. You see, I'm not much of a scientist, but I do know we have at least one conductor remaining which will reach across that gap."

The young doctor stared at him unbelievingly.

Hendrix answered the other's unspoken question:

"You!"

Gordon felt the hair on the back of his neck rise in a prickle of fear. Before he could speak, Hendrix went on:

"Did you think I'd never seen a man's body short-circuit a third rail, Gordon?" he mocked. "Surely you're aware that the human body is a conductor of electricity. Or haven't you ever watched an electrocution?" He paused to enjoy the effect of his words. "That's where I got the idea, you see. Then I got to thinking about those little 'shocking machines' we used to play with when I was a boy. Half a dozen of us would join hands, the ones on the ends each holding one of the handles. Then someone would turn the crank and everyone would get the shock. That convinced me. I knew a body would close that circuit!"

Gordon scarcely heard Barbara's gasp of horror. Like one sleepwalking, he moved forward.

"So you think I'm going to electrocute myself just in order to get you back beyond that barrier," he rasped. There was something grimly primitive about the way his blunt fingers flexed as he closed in on the lawyer. "Do you think I'm afraid of that gun, Hendrix? Do you think I wouldn't a thousand times prefer it to electrocution—?"

"Stop!" cracked the other's voice harshly. "I'm not a complete fool, Doctor. That's why I grabbed the girl."

THE psychiatrist stopped short. Hendrix went on: "I won't even try to shoot you, Gordon. But before you can lay a hand on me, I'll plant three slugs in this hell-cat's body. I won't kill her, either—not right off. I'll shoot her in the stomach, so she can spend a long time dying!"

The blood was draining from Gordon's broad face. His brain whirled. He was trapped—trapped in this devil's clever snare like a rabbit in a twitch-up. For a moment he thought wildly of flinging himself forward, regardless of consequences, in the hope of wresting the gun from the lawyer before he could shoot. As if reading his mind, Hendrix swung Barbara around, rammed the muzzle of the Bankers' Special against her stomach.

"Try it," the lawyer invited. "Try it—and see how far you get!"

The strength flowed out of the young doctor's muscles. Wearily he gestured his surrender. "You win. You've got all the cards."

"Don't say it, Fred, don't say it!" begged Barbara, her voice rising hysterically. "Don't you see? He'll kill me anyhow. He can't let me live now."

Gordon nodded. "I know, my dear. He'll kill you. But at least I can hope he'll kill you quickly—mercifully—if I help him to get back."

He turned to Hendrix.

"All right," he grated, "turn it on. The professor adjusted everything before. That big switch there is the one you pull."

"I know," smirked the other. "I watched the pair of you fooling around the panel before." Dragging Barbara with him, he stalked over to the control board, jerked down the big switch. There was a gleam of triumph in his eyes as he turned to Gordon again. "Grab hold of those magnesium stubs in the sockets," he ordered. "The girl and I will stand right here and watch you fry."

Slowly, his face sheet-white, breathing heavily, Gordon stepped into the slot between the giant coils.

"Don't!" screamed Barbara. "Don't do it, Fred. Stop!" She struggled vainly against Hendrix's grip.

WITHOUT so much as a backward glance, the psychiatrist raised his hands. They were trembling slightly. Jaw set, he reached out for those deadly stubs of silvery metal. With a sudden jerk forward, he grasped them simultaneously with both hands.

Nothing happened.

A moment passed. Another. A sob of relief burst from Barbara's throat. Hendrix's jaw sagged in disbelief. Gordon turned back. Across the space between them he strode, jerked the girl out of the lawyer's grasp.

"Satisfied?" he jeered. "Ready to believe the truth—that we can't get back to our own world; that we've got to die in this one?" Disdaining even to take away the other's gun, he slammed the switch back to its former position . . . The light around them was growing brighter now. The luminous horrors were closing in, like vultures gathering above a battlefield.

"They're tired of waiting!" Gordon's voice jarred. "They're going to swoop down on us any minute now, Hendrix—and this time we haven't any magnesium to fight them off!"

The lawyer whipped up the gun, leveled it at his own temple. Before he could pull the trigger, the other had jerked down his hand.

"No you don't!" the psychiatrist snapped. "You don't take the easy way. You die here with us, as we die."

The lawyer was sobbing, babbling meaningless syllables in a paroxysm of fear. He clawed at Gordon for possession of the gun. Gordon caught him by the coat lapels, gave him a shove straight backwards . . . Stumbling, staggering, Hendrix lurched between the coils. He tripped over his own feet, started to fall. Instinctively his hands clawed for support, slapped onto the stubby magnesium terminals.

Violet flame encased his body. A single tortured scream burst from his lips. His body exploded in a spasm of muscular reaction, frantically endeavoring to escape the invisible bonds of electricity which glued his hands to those silvery grips. But the power was too great. Hendrix's body hung there, twitching and jerking and twisting, while the roar of invisible dynamos filled the air.

(Continued on page 89)

Peter Pettingrew's

Pettigrew captured a strange prisoner; one whose methods of sabotage were unique. He had a weird dust in a bag...

"SO much," concluded Sergeant McCurdle, "for delayed action bombs. Now, as to incendiaries, Mr. Pettigrew—"

("Halt, you cowardly cur!" rasped Peter Pettigrew to the sinister figure creeping from a dark covert of his imagination. *"Advance and give the countersign. What? You don't know it? I thought not! Then take* that, *you*

Prisoner

by NELSON S. BOND

The man threw a handful of dust into Pettigrew's face

dirty Nazi spy, you! And that, and that, *and* THAT!")

"*Mister* Pettigrew!"

The daydream of Peter Pettigrew, student Air Warden, popped like a penny balloon. He started from his bench, pale eyes blinking bewilderedly. The enemy agent had disappeared. This was no blacked-out and vital defense zone, no strategically important military objective, but the warm, bright, all-too-familiar lecture room of the city Armory. All about him, giggling at his confusion, sat his fellow students, more than four score strong. Glaring at him wrathfully was the regular Army noncom assigned to training this volunteer brigade.

"Well, Mr. Pettigrew," repeated Sergeant McCurdle in acid tones, "if

you've *quite* finished your little nap—?"

"Y-yes, sir!" gulped Peter Pettigrew apologetically. "I—I'm sorry, sir. I must have dozed off."

"In the Army," growled McCurdle ominously, "soldiers who doze off wake up in the clink! I'd like to see you—But never mind that now. Before you were so rudely awakened, Mr. Pettigrew, we were discussing bomb defense. Now, suppose *you* tell us the proper way of handling an incendiary bomb. Let's assume you are guarding a wooden warehouse filled with highly inflammable military stores.

"An incendiary shell scores a direct hit; concussion knocks you out momentarily. When you come to, you learn that the bomb has exploded and is scattering gouts of flame around the building. What do you do?"

"I—er—I run to the water-hose," said Peter, "and turn the nozzle to fine spray—"

"The water system is broken," said Sergeant McCurdle helpfully. *"Saboteurs* have slashed the hose to ribbons."

"Then I—I get buckets and sand, and—"

"Fifth columnists," challenged McCurdle, "have mixed gunpowder into the sand."

"Oh!" said Peter Pettigrew bleakly. "They have? In that case, I—I call the fire department, send out a general alarm, and attempt to fight a delaying action until help gets there. With chemicals, perhaps, or—"

"The fire extinguishers," howled McCurdle gleefully, "have been diluted with soda pop! The alarm siren was stolen by Quislings! The telephone wires are cut! The force of the explosion broke the windows, and wind is fanning the blaze!

"The floor is scorching beneath your feet, the walls are ablaze, tongues of flame are licking at precious boxes of *matériel!* Think, Mr. Pettigrew! Think hard! Many lives and much valuable property depend on your prompt action. What do you do? What is the first thing your hand must seek?"

THE room was warm, but a cold perspiration moistened Peter Pettigrew's brow. His eyes roved, his collar strangled him. His tongue was a wad of cotton.

"Why—er—" he muttered feverishly.

"W r o n g !" Sergeant McCurdle seized the word, worried it as a terrier worries a rubber bone. *"Never* wire! Wire is the last thing you should touch, Pettigrew. Under conditions such as those described, wire would be melting-hot. It would burn the flesh off your bones!

"No—" He stared at the smaller man disdainfully—"No, Mr. Pettigrew, I fear you would be of no use in an emergency of this nature. As a matter of fact, I don't think you belong in this group. Some men, Pettigrew, simply don't fit. You seem to be one of them. Why don't you drop out? Turn in your uniform and enter some other branch of civilian service? Canteen work, for instance, or knitting sweaters—?"

Someone behind Peter Pettigrew tittered, and someone else muttered, "That's right! If a man can't do a man's work he ought to—" Peter's lower lip trembled, and the stalwart figure of Sergeant McCurdle danced before his eyes. He shook his head doggedly.

"But—but I *like* this work, Sergeant. I *want* to be an Air Raid Warden."

McCurdle's shrug was eloquent.

"Well, it's Uncle Sam's headache. If you persist in wasting the government's time and money, I can't prevent it." To the others he said, "That's all

for tonight, folks. We're having a practice blackout at midnight, remember. City-wide. Every Warden must be at his post by then. You all know where your locations are? All right—hop to 'em! Eh? What? Oh, *you* again, Pettigrew? Well, what do you want now?"

"Excuse me, sir," said Peter meekly, "but—what was my mistake? What *was* the first thing I should have done?"

"Done?" thundered Sergeant McCurdle. "Why, any fool knows you should have—er—er—" His brows furrowed, then cleared miraculously. "Don't try to make *me* do your thinking for you, Pettigrew! That's *your* assignment, not mine. Think it out. And see that you've arrived at the correct answer by our next meeting. All right—class dismissed!"

"NO hose," said Peter Pettigrew to himself, "no sand or siren or telephone. Fire spreading rapidly. Warehouse is filled with inflammable supplies—Oh, it's no use! McCurdle was right. I guess I'm just a—a misfit!"

The last word came out "mzzglmmp," punctuated, as it was, by something suspiciously akin to a sigh . . . or a sob.

There is an estimated total of two hundred and sixty thousand volunteer Air Raid Wardens now training for civilian defense duty in the United States. Of this number, about two hundred and fifty-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine had greater aptitude for their jobs than did Peter Pettigrew.

Two strikes had been called on this unhappy child of misfortune, and the Celestial Umpire's arm was already rising on the third, when Peter wailed entrance into this mad world. To begin with, as a specimen of manhood Peter Pettigrew was a washout. Padded shoulders helped conceal his spindling frame and built-up heels added a futile inch to his diminutive stature, but no aids, mechanical or sartorial, could ever remove the anemic pallor from his complexion, lend distinction to an unruly fuzz of taffy-colored hair, or cleanse his eyes of the pathetic wistfulness which mirrored his personality. Peter's physical counterpart was the photo labelled *Before* in the "BE STRONG LIKE ME!" ads.

Moreover, Peter was shy. Terribly, horribly, inconceivably shy of everything and anything that walked, swam, or flew on, under, or above the surface of the earth. He gulped when he talked, and never raised his voice to a degree louder than a timid bleat. Strangers frightened him . . . acquaintances embarrassed him . . . and he had no friends. He turned every hue of the rainbow when so much as noticed by members of the fair sex, and ate always in cafeterias in order to avoid the dread task of ordering from a waitress.

His position in life was just what you might expect; he was the smallest imaginable cog in an organization so huge that to all save his immediate clerical companions he was but another name on the payroll.

He earned enough to live and eat and visit a theatre once a week and support a second cousin in Oregon whom he had never seen in his life, but whose demanding letters threw him into a perfect frenzy of obligation. He dressed soberly, let subway guards shove him around without protest, and permitted himself nothing more highly intoxicant than an occasional Dr. Zipper.

Thus Peter Pettigrew. Or thus, to be more accurate, the Peter Pettigrew who slipped his brief and unobrusive way before the public eye.

BUT—there was *another* Peter Pettigrew! An unknown and unsus-

pected Peter Pettigrew in whose veins raced the fire of heroes, behind whose mild and tawny eyes burned slumbering volcanoes. This was the man—the laughing, taunting, daring champion of derring-do—whom Peter dreamed himself to be. A questing knight with thews of steel and agile mind and tongue of rapier wit. This was the man whom Peter was when, in dead of night, his meagre body tossing restlessly on bunchy kapok, his untrammeled soul rode the magic highways of Dreamworld in search of dark adventure. This man was Peter when, blackness engulfing a lean, tense figure straining forward in his movie seat, Peter's hungry heart followed a shaft of silver brilliance to identify itself with whatever solitary soul was worst beset by the encroaching forces of evil.

This was the strange, new Peter Pettigrew who *now,* a sliver of darkness in the shadow of a doorway, now smiled and hurled defiance at the hordes of foes arraigned against him.

"So!" hissed Peter mockingly. *"So! You think you'd like to blow up the Armory, would you? Well, we'll see about that, you dirty, sneaky old Japs, you! Brrrp-brrrp-brrrp—"* His small frame trembled with excitement as he swept the gray street with imaginary Tommy-gun fire—*"there's no use crying for mercy now!"* laughed Peter triumphantly. *"You should have thought of that before you attacked us! Oh, it's* knives *now? No, you don't! Remember Pearl Harbor! Brrrrrrp—"*

"Cut out that damned racket! Stop it!" The roaring voice sheared a path through Peter's concentration, dealing a sudden end to his tiny, private drama. "What the hell do you think you're doing, anyhow? Who—Oh! I might have known!"

Only gloom masked the sick mantle of Peter's crimson embarrassment. His heart within him shriveled to the size of a raisin, and leaden butterflies fluttered in his stomach.

"H-hello, Sergeant McCurdle," he ventured weakly.

The Army man, more fiercely militant than ever, with his Colt .44 an ugly lump at his thigh, his gas mask over his shoulder, glared at the little volunteer malevolently.

"What in blazes is the meaning of all this noise and confusion, Pettigrew? Don't you know—?"

"I was—I was just pretending, sir," writhed Peter.

"Pretending what? Pretending to be a steam calliope or something? Anyhow, Pettigrew—" A sudden thought struck the non-com; he scowled at his wristwatch. "It's two minutes before twelve! Why are you still snooping around the Armory? Why aren't you at your post?"

"I—" began Peter. "I—"

"NEVER mind," interrupted McCurdle. "Never mind the alibis, Pettigrew. Disobedience of orders in an emergency—that's enough for me! You can turn in your uniform *now!* And goodbye, Mr. Pettigrew!"

"B-but—" faltered Peter.

"And," appended Sergeant McCurdle, "good riddance!"

"B-but this *is* my post, Sergeant!" wailed Peter. "I was assigned to guard this sector during the trial blackout!"

"Y-you *what?"* This time it was McCurdle whose voice cracked on a dismal note.

"I was assigned to guard this sector, sir—"

"Don't repeat, Pettigrew!" The baffled topkick gave vent to a groan. "I heard you the first time. *You!* On duty at this post! Of all the muddleheaded assignments—Damn it, man, this Armory is one of the most vital

military objectives in the whole city!"

"It—it is?" piped Peter with sudden eagerness.

"Perhaps *the* most important! Pettigrew, do you know the entire basement of this building is filled with gunpowder and dynamite? Enough to blow the surrounding neighborhood to Kingdom Come! And within three city blocks of here stand the City Hall, the Federal Building, two factories engaged in war armaments production, and a Marine barracks!"

"Th-there are?" gulped Peter with less eagerness.

"And of all men," despaired McCurdle, "*you* had to be assigned to this post. And in less than a minute the warning will be sounded. Well—" He shrugged— "It's too late now. It's your pigeon. You've drawn your equipment?"

"Equip—Oh, yes, sir! Right here!" Peter patted a gas mask container at his side and, rather more gingerly, the automatic at his hip. "I'm all-ready, sir."

"Very well, Pettigrew. From now on—" The topkick had to raise his voice to a bellow to make himself heard over the banshee blast that had suddenly wakened and howled from a hundred simultaneous sources—"it's up to you! Carry on!"

And as the gray gloom of the city night was suddenly engulfed in ebon black, as feverish eyes of electric and neon blinked out one by one over a city grimly readying itself for any eventuality, Sergeant McCurdle moved into the darkness—and was gone!

AT FIRST his disappearance was a relief to the small would-be Air Warden. Then, as the ear-shattering sirens died into muted silence, as McCurdle's footsteps pattered off into murkiness, a vast, enswaddling stillness descended upon Peter Pettigrew—and with it came stark realization of his perfect aloneness. In Stygian gloom he murmured, "Oh, my goodness! I'm all alone!" and raised a trembling hand before his eyes. It was a vague, white blob in the darkness. Tingling fingers of panic clutched at Peter's nerves, and his ganglea hummed like harpstrings. "Oh, my soul!" he jittered. "It's so *dark!*"

Civic authorities had deliberately chosen a moonless night for this experiment. Mother Nature had collaborated by veiling the sky with a thick overcast, making the night starless as well. The street upon which Peter stood was as black as a whale's belly. Except for—

"Oh, mercy me!" bleated Peter, "this will never do!"

And his panic subsiding in the face of this unallowable thing, he scurried down the street to a dwelling beneath the lowered blinds of which escaped one lone, betraying slant of light. Hastily he ascended its steps, more hastily rapped on the door.

"Lights out!" he cried. "Air alert! Lights—"

The door flew open suddenly, hurling a blazing flood of forbidden illumination into Peter's eyes. A figure loomed in the doorway; the figure of a man whose shoulders seemed to stop the entrance, who towered threateningly above Peter.

"Hey?" roared this outraged Titan. "What's this all about? Whatcha tryin' to—?"

"—out!" ended Peter feebly. "L-lights out, if you don't mind, please, mister. It's an—an alert—"

There came a sudden, menacing *snap!* and Peter closed his eyes, wondering dimly which arm or leg was broken and why it didn't hurt. Then stunningly:

"Sure, Warden!" came a husky whis-

per. "I fergot. I was list'nin' to the Tchi-cargo Symphony an' fergot all about the blackout. I'm sorry."

And Peter opened his eyes to discover that the house was in jet blackness, and the big man was softly shutting the door!

He turned and stumbled down the steps. But where he had been nervous before, he was now aflame with a strange and new sensation. A wild, heady sensation—the intoxication of power! For the first time in his mousy life, Peter Pettigrew had issued an order. And that order had been obeyed!

Self-confidence, a feeling so rare in his past as to have been non-existent, swept through him like a hot torrent. His head lifted proudly; he trod on fluffy clouds. He drew a long, tremulous breath.

"Warden!" he murmured happily. "*Warden* Pettigrew!"

THEN, as if something within him had been long waiting this moment, there came to pass the rebirth of Peter Pettigrew. The old Peter died, and occupant of his body was the cool, cagey, daring and resourceful Peter with thews of steel and heart of flame.

And the renascent Peter, viewing this situation, was not satisfied.

"Too dark!" decided the new Peter. "Too dangerously dark. *They* might try something. I ought to have cat's eyes. Now, let me see—Aah! I have it!"

And suddenly bethinking himself of the spectacles he wore to protect his eyes against harmful rays when he took an ultra-violet "sun bath" every week, he drew the shaded lenses from his pocket and slipped them over his eyes.

It did not matter that the glasses—speaking from a purely physical standpoint — could not c o n c e i v a b l y strengthen Peter's vision. He *thought* they did, and that is what really counts. Great is the influence of mind over matter.

With increased assurance, he stalked down the silent street to assume his post of duty before the Armory's portal. And it was then he saw the sinister stranger.

THE stranger was hurrying up the street toward Peter. This was not, in itself, cause for alarm. Thousands of good, solid, liberty-loving Americans had doubtless been caught off guard by the wail of the sirens. But *this* man, who seemed to cling to the darkest shadows of an everywhere-dark road, made no sound as he walked! He glided forward noiselessly. Moreover, his diminutive but chunky frame bent beneath the burden of a heavy gunny-sack that might have contained—

What? wondered Peter Pettigrew. Anything! Anything at all, he decided. Bombs, hand grenades, ground glass! His jaw tightened; he stepped forward.

"Just a moment, there!" he piped peremptorily. "Who are you? What are you do—?"

But the sinister stranger either did not hear him or chose to disregard his challenge. He had paused, now, before the very door of the Armory, taken from somewhere and scanned what appeared to be a notebook. He nodded his head pleasedly and turned to the building. The rap of his knuckles was soft in the silence; the door swung open and he vanished.

Peter sprang into action. This was all wrong! This was his post; if it were learned that he had permitted anyone to effect entrance into the Armory unquestioned he would lose his precious Wardenship. Perhaps even — Peter quaked—since this incident had occurred in line of duty, he would be tried

by a military court, found guilty, and shot at sunrise!

On legs that felt suddenly hollow, he raced forward, hurled himself at the Armory door and pounded frantically. A uniformed private of the regular Army opened it for him. The soldier looked faintly surprised.

"What—Oh, hello, there! You're the warden on duty here, aren't you? What's up? Blackout over?"

"It's an all night practice," snapped Peter, "as you ought to know. But never mind that now. That stranger—who was he? Where did he go?"

"Huh?" The soldier stared at him curiously. "Is it a gag, buddy? What stranger?"

"The one," rasped Peter, "you just admitted. He refused to answer my challenge—"

"Are you crazy?" The soldier sniggered drowsily and leaned his rifle against the wall. "Nobody came through this doorway, bud, except you."

Quick suspicion fanned to a fiercer blaze in Peter's bosom. Then his hunch had been right! The sinister stranger *was* an enemy agent, and this soldier in Uncle Sam's khaki was a dupe, a hireling, a Fifth Columnist! With a swift movement he grasped the guard's rifle, levelled it at its owner.

"So!" hissed Peter Pettigrew, patriot. "You thought you could get away with it, eh? Well, the jig's up! Over my dead body you'll pull one of your dastardly Nazi tricks! Not a move, now! Move a muscle and I—I'll shoot—"

And his finger tensed on the trigger. But the other man's face did not draw into the lines of hatred and violence Peter half expected. Instead, the soldier grinned amiably at him.

"Okay, buddy," he chuckled. "Enjoy yourself. Quite a card, ain't you? Well—" He yawned prodigiously—"'at's okay by me. I'm gettin' . . . kinda . . . sleepy. Think I'll snatch . . . forty winks. Wake me up . . . when the alert's over . . . over . . ."

He slumped onto a bench, and fell fast asleep!

FOR a moment fantastically long, Peter stared at him incredulously. Then recollection of a more immediate problem than this flooded back on him. There was a mystery here, but elsewhere in the building was a skulking spy whose plot Peter must nip in the bud.

He wheeled and hastened into the drill-room. No one there but a drowsy radioman, nodding over his transmitter. A dozen doors opened off the drill-room. Peter, scurrying from one to another, noted with subconscious approbation that each room with windows to the outer street was darkened. Only the inner chambers of the Armory were lighted.

But of the sack-bearing stranger there was no trace. Room after room was deserted, save for here a detail of slumbering reserves, there an Intelligence officer cat-napping at his desk. This latter raised his head when Peter roused him, repeated muzzily, Whuza? Lil man with a bag? Uh-uh. Di'n see'm—" and went back to sleep.

Peter wasted no more time upstairs. The basement was "out of bounds" for all civilians and, indeed, for all soldiers save those specifically assigned to guard it, but this was no time to adhere to normal regulations. Peter raced toward the store-rooms, and was just in time to see, as he found the top of the staircase, a tableau on the landing below that forever justified his fears.

The little man was there! He was tiptoeing silently toward the unsuspecting back of a guard assigned to watch the stores. As he crept he fumbled at the mouth of his gunnysack and—re-

markable verity Peter could scarcely believe—he was humming a soft tune!

Peter knew what he should do. He *should* shout aloud to warn the soldier. But when he opened his mouth it felt as if he had swallowed a throatful of warm glue; his lips were a pair of adhesive plasters muting a larynx frozen with terror. The best he could manage was a tiny, whimpering bleat.

It was not enough. The soldier, as though warned by some belated, intuitive sense, whirled just as the interloper gained his side. But his eyes never recognized peril, for at that instant the little man's hand flew from the bag, hurling something squarely into the guard's face.

And—the soldier dropped his rifle, yawned noisily, rubbed his eyes with clenched fists, staggered to a seat, and fell fast asleep at his post!

In that moment, Peter Pettigrew understood all. Now he knew why the guard at the outer gate had not stopped —had not even remembered! — the stranger. He knew, too, why every defender of this building save himself was lost in Dreamland. The stranger's bag was filled with a new and dreadful weapon. A powder with the power of drugging victims into heavy slumber!

Anaesthesia! But if that were so, it was useless to pursue the little man who now, having glanced once again into his notebook—a leaflet of instructions, no doubt—was moving stealthily down the corridor. One whiff of the substance and he, like the others, would—"But, no!" squealed Peter Pettigrew. For a thought had struck him with swift, encouraging force. Over his right shoulder was slung that which made him invulnerable to the spy's treacherous weapon. His gas mask!

TO think, with this reborn Peter, was to act. In an instant he had whipped the mask from its sack and snuggled it about his face. Sucking filtered air through its *kobold*-like mouthpiece lent the final touch of isolation from worldliness—a process begun with the donning of the tinted spectacles. But protected, now, from fumes and glooms alike, hand resting on the comforting grip of his automatic, Peter crept down the staircase.

The door through which the stranger had vanished was labelled POWDER ROOM: DANGER! in bold scarlet. As Peter drew nearer this door he was astonished to hear a faint muttering. Peering cautiously around the doorjamb he discovered this was the stranger murmuring petulantly to himself as he scowled at his little book.

"It says," frowned the stocky man, "three more. But where in the name of Hypnos *are* they? There's no one else in here. Another infernal mix-up in the O.D.D., that's what! I wish they'd get things straightened out—"

Then Peter moved. Whipping his automatic out of its holster, he burst into the ammunition-packed room, shouting a wild and—he hoped—stern command.

"Hands up!" he cried. "Surrender in the name of the—I mean, stick 'em up! I've got you!"

The little man whirled, startled. But surprisingly, his lips cracked in a grin, and his voice was pleased.

"Oh, *there* you are!" he said. "I was worrying about you. The others coming along soon? Well—nighty-night!"

And with a movement so swift, so deft, that no human eye could follow it, his hand dipped into the sack, grasped a handful of the slumber-producing dust—and flung it squarely into Peter's face!

FOR a moment, sheer shock immobilized Peter. He had expected cringing capitulation; he had met de-

fiance, instead. It is a different matter to dream of slaughtering hundreds of charging enemies than to pull the trigger on one, small antagonist armed with only a gunnysack. So Peter did nothing.

But the *saboteur* did an amazing thing. He pencilled a checkmark in his little notebook. Then, quietly crooning a tune that sounded astonishingly like a lullaby, he shouldered his bag and started from the room. Peter roused. His piping voice rang clarion-clear in the echoing chamber.

"Oh, no you don't! Stand still, you! Drop that bag and lift your hands or I'll—I'll—"

And he got what he wanted. The visitor *did* drop the bag. But his clutch was not nerveless from fright so much as from surprise! A look of blank incredulity widened his eyes, and his jaw dropped slack as he gasped:

"You—you're still awake!"

"You bet your boots I'm awake!" declared Peter boldly. "You didn't think you'd get *me* with that stuff, you—"

"And you—" gulped the little man—"you *see* me!"

"See you? Of course I see you! If you take another step, you dirty old Nazi, you—"

"Nazi!" exclaimed the stranger indignantly. "I'm no Nazi!"

"Oh, no? What's your name?"

"My name," said the chubby one, "is Ole Luk Oie. In some circles I am known as Noctus or Suom, but—"

"Never mind the aliases," said Peter. "Ole Luk Oie, eh? A Norwegian. One of Quisling's men?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," blazed his prisoner. "I don't know anything about quisling. I've never quissled in my life. But I do know *one* thing: when I see the Assignment Clerk at the O.D.D. again, I'm going to raise blue fumes about this! I was *never* so mortified! Imagine *me* held at a pistol's point by a mortal who defies my Sands—"

"That'll do!" rapped Peter sternly. "I'll talk; you answer. What's this O.D.D. you mentioned?"

"Why, the Office of Dream Distribution," snapped the stranger, "of course! The outfit I work for. Now, see here, mortal—point that thing the other way before it goes off by accident and creates a scandal. It can't kill me, of course, but hanged if I want to go through eternity with lead bullets in my gizzard. Woden knows my digestion is awful enough now, what with staying up all night and those brazen Walküre keeping me awake all day with their noisy war-chants—"

But he need not have elaborated on his request. For Peter, his hand wobbling like an aspen leaf in a tornado, had already thrust the .44 back into its holster, and was staring at his captive with horror-stricken eyes. Peter passed a dry tongue over drier lips. And:

"W-who are you?" he croaked.

"I've already told you once," said the little fellow testily. "I'm Ole Luk Oie. The Bringer of Sleep. The Sandman!"

"THE Sand—*Ooooh!*" moaned Peter Pettigrew. Beneath his feet the world quaked and quivered. Its motion developed an identical counterpart in Peter's interior. He braced himself to hurl a last rebellious salvo at this enemy of reason. "But—but the Sandman is only a—*a myth!*"

"Myth your eye!" retorted Ole Luk Oie savagely. "Do I *look* like a myth?" He did not. He looked most solid, most substantial, sturdy arms akimbo on his firmly planted thighs, eyes flashing indignation. "And that reminds me, how can you see me? I'm invisible, you know."

"N-not to me," quavered Peter Pettigrew.

"That," frowned Ole Luk Oie, "is obvious. But—Ah! Those dark things you're wearing over your eyes? What do you call them?"

"They—they're special glasses," said Peter meekly, "to cut down ultra-violet radiation."

"So that's it?" Ole Luk Oie nodded sagely. "Now it begins to make sense. We're in the infra-red, you know. All of us immortals. And you humans have been leading us a merry chase ever since your scientists discovered how to photograph our wave-length. Snapping our pictures at seances—"

"Spirit photography!" exclaimed Peter. "Then—then it's *not* a fake? You do sometimes communicate—?"

"Now, don't get ideas, mortal! Yes, we do; but just for a gag. We never really tell anything. We don't want you jerks muscling in on *our* world and messing it up like yours.

"So the glasses let you see me. And the dream-sands didn't work because you're wearing that mask. Well—take it off!"

"Off?" repeated Peter. "Certainly not!"

The little man frowned impatiently.

"Now, don't be difficult, human! You've got to take it off, you know."

"Why?" demanded Peter stubbornly.

"Because it says here in this book," pointed out Ole Luk Oie, "that three more mortals are to be put to sleep here in this room. You're one of them, of course. So—"

He reached for his fallen bag. But a sudden thought flashed through Peter's brain with the brilliance of a comet. He sprang forward challengingly, swept the gunnysack from the little demigod's hands.

"Oh, no you don't!" he cried. "That's mine!"

Ole Luk Oie glared at him irately.

"Yours in a centaur's eye!" he snorted. "It's mine! A brand-new, imported job. I got it just last millennium from the Arachne Weaving Corporation in Olympus. Hand it over!"

"It *was* yours," yammered Peter. "But it's mine now! I'm turning the contents over to the government. Do you know what this is? The greatest offensive military weapon any man ever discovered! Anaesthetic sands! Our lab men will analyze this powder, learn how to make it. With this, our forces can bring the war to a swift and humane end!"

"You," declared Ole Luk Oie flatly, "are crazy! The Sands aren't the only offensive thing around here. In just a few minutes, I'm going to lose my patience, human. Hand back that bag, or by Baldar—"

WHAT dire threat he would have uttered, Peter Pettigrew was destined never to learn. For at that moment came an interruption. From the doorway behind them came a sound that caused both man and demigod to spin. The sharp, incisive cry of a voice raised in command.

"*Achtung!* Turn quietly, swine, and lift your hands! *Ach, zu!* Now, Franz . . . Otto . . . to your work!"

Peter's eyes bulged wide, and his lips loosed a tiny moan. For standing in the doorway, armed to the teeth, stood three men from whose eyes gleamed the fanataicism of the creed for which they labored. These were no supernatural and benevolent creatures, but flesh-and-blood men; their purpose here was evident. The destruction of this Armory and its stores!

The underling Nazi agents needed no second bidding. With the grim, mechanical purposefulness of their race, they leaped to their task. One sprang

to the nearest hogshead of gunpowder, smashed loose a stave and began scattering the barrel's contents about the chamber. The other ripped open a carton of dynamite sticks, hastily unreeled and adjusted the wires of a detonator.

While his underlings labored, the leader enjoyed the luxury of gloating over his accomplishment.

"So," he gibed, "there you stand, foolishly agape as sheep! You wonder at our being here, *nichts wahr?* Ach, you *verdammt Amerikanische!* You are all fools! Not only do you advertise in the public papers your idiotic practice blackout, but you leave your Armory unguarded!

"In the Fatherland such madness would not be tolerated! Our *Fuehrer* weeds out the weak and incompetent. That is why we will soon rule the world!" He personalized his scorn, directed it squarely at Peter Pettigrew. "Little man, you have a revolver at your side. Why don't you draw it? Is it because you fear death? What? You don't answer? You are silent? But why is that? You were voluble enough a moment ago when we entered the room. Standing here alone in an empty chamber, chattering to yourself like an insane ape—"

"A-lone!" The word wrenched itself unbidden from Peter's lips. Like a blinding flash of light, the truth hit him. Of course! The *saboteurs* wore no ultra-violet glasses. They saw no Ole Luk Oie standing and watching this typically "human" drama with detached disinterest. Peter gulped. "Oh! Oh, yes. A-lone. I was just—"

"Come closer, little man!" taunted the Nazi captain. "I would pinch your scrawny arm to test if you are a man or a mouse. *Stop!* What are you leaning over for?"

"My — my shoelace — " faltered Peter. "It—it came untied—" But his heart gave a tremendous leap. For now he knew that the Sandman's *bag,* too, was invisible to the enemy. And that bag of dream-dust was now secure within his hands.

"Never mind your shoelace!" commanded his antagonist. "Walk toward me slowly with your arms raised—There! *Das ist gut!* I see you wear a uniform. Tell me, little man, what is the strength of this garrison? When I make my report—"

PETER was grateful for the semi-gloom of the chamber. Were it not shadowy, the German must have noticed that though his arms were above his head his elbows bent with strain, and his knuckles were tensed whitely with the effort of gripping a heavy sack above his head. He shuffled forward another step. Another. Another . . .

"That is near enough!" said his captor. "Franz, you are nearly finished? You too, Otto? *Gut!* Light the fuses. In a moment we shall go. Well, little man, speak! Will you answer and be allowed to flee with us, or will you hold your silence and die here?"

"W-what is it you wanted to know?" bleated Peter Pettigrew, desperately stalling for time. He was almost within arm's reach of his foeman now. Another step. . . .

"The strength of this garrison. Yes, I know you call it a 'civilian defense post', but that is dirty, democratic propaganda. Tell me the truth! How strong are your forces?"

And then—Peter acted!

"*This* strong!" he cried in a voice of shocking thunder. And with the full force of his meagre frame, supplemented by the unleashed vigor of his righteous wrath, he brought the sack down heavily on the Nazi's head!

The German cried out once, thickly —then collapsed. The bag split. A

cloud of milky-gray powder spumed into the air, flew, spread, eddied into every nook and cranny. Franz and Otto had barely time to turn before it clogged their nostrils, felling them in their tracks like stricken steers. A stifling sensation gripped Peter Pettigrew by the throat.

Glancing down, he discovered with horror that in his eagerness to strike and strike hard he had torn his gas-mask loose. Slumber-dust was now filtering through the crevice, stealing into *his* lungs, too!

He turned agonized eyes to the attentive Ole Luk Oie. He cried, "Sandman! But you—you can't do this to me! The Sands! Mus' . . . have 'em . . . f'r the gov'ment. F'r. . . ."

That was all. He lurched forward sleepily and fell headlong to the floor. Ole Luk Oie minced toward him gingerly, retrieved the forsaken sack and studied the rent in its side with sorrow

"The very *best* material!" he muttered. "Now they'll make me get a new one. Oh, well—it was an interesting show, anyhow!" And before he left, he leaned once, strangely tender, over the prostrate little Pettigrew.

"Well done, small human," he crooned softly. "Sleep well, and sweet dreams. Forever may your dreams henceforth come true!"

And he turned, but he did not walk from the chamber. He simply lifted his head in a curious gesture. One instant he was there—the next he was gone.

OUT of the dark and pleasant rollingness of slumber, Peter wakened to hear faraway voices drawing nearer and nearer. Something cold and wet was at his lips; he swallowed and choked on a liquid-like honeyed fire. The voice said:

"You all right now, Pettigrew? Here, take another swig of this brandy—"

"Brandy!" gasped Peter Pettigrew, wide awake. "Oh, my gracious, *brandy!* T-take it away!"

"Sure," soothed the voice. "Sure, Pettigrew. Anything you say. After tonight, you can have anything you want around here, including the world with a pink ribbon around it if you ask."

After tonight! Recollection flooded back upon Peter. He lifted himself to one elbow. He was lying on a cot in the upper drill-hall of the Armory. About him were the faces of his fellow student Air Wardens, uniformed figures of regular Army officers; the shoulder propping him up, the voice speaking into his ear, the face peering down into his, all belonged to Sergeant McCurdle. An inexplicably altered Sergeant McCurdle, whose eyes were respectful and admiring.

"Wh-what happened?" demanded Peter. "Ole Luk Oie—did he get away? And the Nazi agents—?"

"Old who?" puzzled McCurdle. "We got the Heinies—three of 'em. That's all there were, wasn't it? Man—" He shook his head admiringly— "I take back everything I ever said or thought about you, Pettigrew. You're a regular wildcat! Why, Joe Louis couldn't have knocked them babies colder than you did! Every one of 'em was out like a light. Their leader ain't come to *yet*. He's as cold as a Labrador herring."

Another voice, deeper and more authoritative, reached Peter's ears. It was the Commanding Officer of the Armory.

"Yes, Pettigrew, it was a magnificent piece of work. You have done your country a great service this night. Had it not been for you, I shudder to think what horror might have been unleashed in this city. You apprehended them in the nick of time. They had already scattered the gunpowder, set their fuses. In another moment—"

"Yes," said Peter. "I know. I mean —Oh, is that so? How about the—er—was there a bag lying on the floor? A bag filled with dust?"

The officers glanced at each other questioningly; one of them muttered sotto voce, *"Wool-gathering, poor chap! And no wonder. After what he's been through—"* The commandant ignored the query. He said, "So I am sending a recommendation to the President, Pettigrew, that you receive a Congressional Medal. Moreover, if you should ever decide to enter the service of your country as a full-fledged militiaman, I should be proud, sir, proud to have you as a member of my company!"

"And now, gentlemen—" With an effort, the officer concealed a yawn—"the hour is late, and I am sure we are all very tired. Suppose we—yaw-rrrm! —leave Mr. Pettigrew to get some much-needed rest."

And he trudged away, followed by a sleepy-eyed staff of subordinates. Peter thought he knew why. Someone had left the basement door open; mingled with the oil and tobacco smoke of the drill-room was a fine scud of eddying dust whose nature Peter knew all too well.

He, too, was drowsy again. But there was one thing he must say to his only remaining companion. "Sergeant," he said, "in the morning we must sweep the storage-room floor carefully, and send the dust to Washington. They've got to analyze it. Very important—"

"Huh?" answered Sergeant McCurdle languidly. "Dust? Oh, sure, Petty, old boy. If you say so. But I don't quite see—aw-rrrm!—why. Hey, move over, willya? I'm gettin' sorta tired myself. . . ."

THUS, PLANNING for the morrow, slumbered Peter Pettigrew, side by side with a newfound friend. And valiant were his dreams. But one person—or was he a person?—knew that this was the only dream of Peter Pettigrew's which should not reach accomplishment. Ole Luk Oie knew that with the dawn no trace would remain of the Sands.

For they were the Sands of Slumber. Such stuff as dreams are made of. . . .

THE END

THE POWERS OF DARKNESS

(Concluded from page 75)

"He didn't know," said Gordon into the tumult. "He never noticed that Professor Larned never turned the power off after he tried to make the spark jump the gap in the bar!"

Slowly the luminous shapes of the creatures of the darkness faded, leaving utter blackness in their wake. And in that blackness Barbara Larned, sobbing with horror, clung close to Fred Gordon. His arms were very tight about her when at last the motors' roar ceased and he threw the small switch that controlled the lights in Professor Larned's cellar room. . . .

They live today, an ideal couple, in the little home they built on the site of old Professor Larned's vast, rambling mansion, a structure which burned down that same night as a result of a short-circuit somewhere in the wiring. In only one way does their home differ from any other: In addition to the regular lighting system, there is a special fluorescent arrangement which provides soft illumination for every nook and cranny of the house. And—

There are no switches by which it may be turned off!

THE END

Lee Anthony crouched to resist the attack of the robed men

The WORLD BEYOND

by RAY CUMMINGS

THE old woman was dying. There could be no doubt of it now. Surely she would not last through the night. In the dim quiet bedroom he sat watching her, his young face grim and awed. Pathetic business, this ending of earthly life, this passing on. In the silence, from the living room downstairs the gay laughter of the young people at the birthday party came floating up. His birthday—Lee Anthony, twenty-one years old today. He had thought he would feel very different, becoming—legally—a man. But the only difference now, was that old Anna Green who had been always so good to him, who had taken care of him almost all his life, now was dying.

Terrible business. But old age is queer. Anna knew what was happening. The doctor, who had given Lee the medicines and said he would be back in the morning, hadn't fooled her. And she had only smiled.

Lee tensed as he saw that she was smiling now; and she opened her eyes. His hand went to hers where it lay, so white, blue-veined on the white bedspread.

"I'm here, Anna. Feel better?"

"Oh, yes. I'm all right." Her faint voice, gently tired, mingled with the sounds from the party downstairs. She heard the laughter. "You should be

OUT of nowhere came grim, black-clad men, to kidnap three Earth people to a weird world where a man could be a giant at will

down there, Lee. I'm all right."

"I should have postponed it," he said. "And what you did, preparing for it—"

She interrupted him, raising her thin arm, which must have seemed so heavy that at once she let it fall again. "Lee—I guess I am glad you're here—want to talk to you—and I guess it better be now."

"Tomorrow—you're tired now—"

"For me," she said with her gentle smile, "there may not be any tomorrow—not here. Your grandfather, Lee—you really don't remember him?"

"I was only four or five."

"Yes. That was when your father and mother died in the aero accident and your grandfather brought you to me."

Very vaguely he could remember it. He had always understood that Anna Green had loved his grandfather, who had died that same year.

"What I want to tell you, Lee—" She seemed summoning all her last remaining strength. "Your grandfather didn't die. He just went away. What you've never known—he was a scientist. But he was a lot more than that. He had—dreams. Dreams of what we mortals might be—what we ought to be—but are not. And so he—went away."

This dying old woman; her mind was wandering? . . .

"Oh—yes," Lee said. "But you're too tired now, Anna dear—"

"Please let me tell you. He had—some scientific apparatus. I didn't see it—I don't know where he went. I think he didn't know either, where he was going. But he was a very good man, Lee. I think he had an intuition—an inspiration. Yes, it must have been that. A man—inspired. And so he went. I've never seen or heard from him since. Yet—what he promised me—if he could accomplish it—tonight—almost now, Lee, would be the time—"

JUST a desperately sick old woman whose blurred mind was seeing visions. Her thin wrinkled face, like crumpled white parchment, was transfigured as though by a vision. Her sunken eyes were bright with it. A wonderment stirred within Lee Anthony. Why was his heart pounding? It seemed suddenly as though he must be sharing this unknown thing of science—and mysticism. As though something within him—his grandfather's blood perhaps—was responding. . . . He felt suddenly wildly excited.

"Tonight?" he murmured.

"Your grandfather was a very good man, Lee—"

"And you, Anna—all my life I have known how good you are. Not like most women—you're just all gentleness—just kindness—"

"That was maybe—just the inspiration from him." Her face was bright with it. "I've tried to bring you up—the way he told me. And what I must tell you now—about tonight, I mean—because I may not live to see it—"

Her breath gave out so that her faint tired voice trailed away.

"What?" he urged. "What is it, Anna? About tonight—"

What a tumult of weird excitement was within him! Surely this was something momentous. His twenty-first birthday. Different, surely, for Lee Anthony than any similar event had ever been for anyone else.

"He promised me—when you were twenty-one—just then—at this time, if he could manage it—that he would come back—"

"Come back, Anna? Here?"

"Yes. To you and me. Because you would be a man—brought up, the best

I could do to make you be—like him—because you would be a man who would know the value of love—and kindness—those things that ought to rule this world—but really do not."

This wild, unreasoning excitement within him . . . ! "You think he will come—tonight, Anna?"

"I really do. I want to live to see him. But now—I don't know—"

He could only sit in silence, gripping her hand. And again the gay voices of his guests downstairs came up like a roar of intrusion. They didn't know that she was more than indisposed. She had made him promise not to tell them.

Her eyes had closed, and now she opened them again. "They're having a good time, aren't they, Lee? That's what I wanted—for you and them both. You see, I've had to be careful—not to isolate you from life—life as it is. Because your grandfather wanted you to be normal—a healthy, happy—regular young man. Not queer—even though I've tried to show you—"

"If he—he's coming tonight, Anna—we shouldn't have guests here."

"When they've had their fun—"

"They have. We're about finished down there. I'll go get rid of them—tell them you're not very well—"

She nodded. "Perhaps that's best—now—"

He was hardly aware of how he broke up the party and sent them away. Then in the sudden heavy silence of the little cottage, here in the grove of trees near the edge of town, he went quietly back upstairs.

HER eyes were closed. Her white face was placid. Her faint breath was barely discernible. Failing fast now. Quietly he sat beside her. There was nothing that he could do. The doctor had said that very probably she could not live through the night. Poor old Anna. His mind rehearsed the life that she had given him. Always she had been so gentle, so wise, ruling him with kindness.

He remembered some of the things she had reiterated so often that his childish mind had come to realize their inevitable truth. The greatest instinctive desire of every living creature is happiness. And the way to get it was not by depriving others of it. It seemed now as though this old woman had had something of goodness inherent to her—as though she were inspired? And tonight she had said, with her gentle smile as she lay dying, that if that were so—it had been an inspiration from his grandfather.

Something of science which his grandfather had devised, and which had enabled him to—go away. What could that mean? Go where? And why had he gone? To seek an ideal? Because he was dissatisfied with life here? Her half incoherent words had seemed to imply that. And now, because Lee was twenty-one—a man—his grandfather was coming back. Because he had thought that Lee would be able to help him? . . . Help him to do—what?

He stirred in his chair. It was nearly midnight now. The little cotage—this little second floor bedroom where death was hovering—was heavy with brooding silence. It was awesome; almost frightening. He bent closer to the bed. Was she dead? No, there was still a faint fluttering breath, but it seemed now that there would be no strength for her to speak to him again.

Mysterious business, this passing on. Her eyelids were closed, a symbol of drawn blinds of the crumbling old house in which she had lived for so long. It was almost a tenantless house now. And yet she was somewhere down there behind those drawn blinds. Reluctant

perhaps to leave, still she lingered, with the fires going out so that it must be cold . . . cold and silent where she huddled. Or was she hearing now the great organ of the Beyond with its sweep of harmonies summoning her to come—welcoming her. . . .

A shiver ran through young Lee Anthony as he saw that the pallid bloodless lips of the white wrinkled face had stirred into a smile. Down there somewhere her spirit—awed and a little frightened doubtless—had opened some door to let the sound of the organ in—and to let in the great riot of color which must have been outside. . . . And then she had not been frightened, but eager. . . .

He realized suddenly that he was staring at an empty shell and that old Anna Green had gone. . . .

A SOUND abruptly brought Lee out of his awed thoughts. It was outside the house—the crunching of wheels in the gravel of the driveway—the squeal of grinding brakes. A car had stopped. He sat erect in his chair, stiffened, listening, with his heart pounding so that the beat of it seemed to shake his tense body. His grandfather—returning?

An automobile horn honked. Footsteps sounded on the verandah. The front doorbell rang.

There were voices outside as he crossed the living room—a man's voice, and then a girl's laugh. He flung open the door. It was a young man in dinner clothes and a tall blonde girl. Tom Franklin, and a vivid, theatrical-looking girl, whom Lee had never seen before. She was inches taller than her companion. She stood clinging to his arm; her beautiful face, with beaded lashes and heavily rouged lips, was laughing. She was swaying; her companion steadied her, but he was swaying himself.

"Easy, Viv," he warned. "We made it—tol' you we would. . . . Hello there, Lee ol' man—your birthday—think I'd forget a thing like that, not on your life. So we come t'celebrate—meet Vivian Lamotte—frien' o' mine. Nice kid, Viv—you'll like her."

"Hello," the girl said. She stared up at Lee. He towered above her, and beside him the undersized, stoop-shouldered Franklin was swaying happily. Admiration leaped into the girl's eyes.

"Say," she murmured, "you sure are a swell looker for a fact. He said you were—but my Gawd—"

"And his birthday too," Franklin agreed, "so we're gonna celebrate—" His slack-jawed, weak-chinned face radiated happiness and triumph. "Came fas' to get here in time. I tol' Viv I could make it—we never hit a thing—"

"Why, yes—come in," Lee agreed awkwardly. He had only met young Tom Franklin once or twice, a year ago now, and Lee had completely forgotten it. The son of a rich man, with more money than was good for him. . . . With old Anna lying there upstairs—surely he did not want these happy inebriated guests here now. . . .

He stood with them just inside the threshold. "I—I'm awfully sorry," he began. "My birthday—yes, but you see—old Mrs. Green—my guardian—just all the family I've got—she died, just a few minutes ago—upstairs here—I've been here alone with her—"

It sobered them. They stared blankly. "Say, my Gawd, that's tough," the girl murmured. "Your birthday too. Tommy listen, we gotta get goin'—can't celebrate—"

It seemed that there was just a shadow out on the dark verandah. A tall figure in a dark cloak.

"Why—what the hell," Franklin muttered.

A group of gliding soundless figures

were out there in the darkness. And across the living room the window sash went up with a thump. A black shape was there, huddled in a great loose cloak which was over the head so that the thing inside was shapeless.

For that instant Lee and his two companions stood stricken. The shapes seemed babbling with weird unintelligible words. Then from the window came words of English:

"We—want—" Slow words, strangely intoned. Young Tom Franklin broke in on them.

"Say—what the devil—who do you people think you are, comin' in here—" He took a swaying step over the threshold. There was a sudden sharp command from one of the shapes. Lee jumped in front of the girl. On the verandah the gliding figures were engulfing Franklin; he had fallen.

Lee went through the door with a leap, his fist driving at the cowled head of one of the figures—a solid shape that staggered backward from his blow. But the others were on him, dropping down before his rush, gripping his legs and ankles. He went down, fighting. And then something struck his face—something that was like a hand, or a paw with claws that scratched him. His head suddenly was reeling; his senses fading. . . .

HOW long he fought Lee did not know. He was aware that the girl was screaming—and that he was hurling clutching figures away—figures that came pouncing back. Then the roaring in his head was a vast uproar. The fighting, scrambling dark shapes all seemed dwindling until they were tiny points of white light—like stars in a great abyss of nothingness. . . .

He knew—as though it were a blurred dream—that he was lying inert on the verandah, with Franklin and the girl lying beside him. . . . The house was being searched. . . . Then the muttering shapes were standing here. Lee felt himself being picked up. And then he was carried silently out into the darkness. The motion seemed to waft him off so that he knew nothing more.

CHAPTER II

The Flight Into Size and Space

LEE came back to consciousness with the feeling that some great length of time must have elapsed. He was on a couch in a small, weird-looking metal room—metal of a dull, grey-white substance like nothing he had ever seen before. With his head still swimming he got up dizzily on one elbow, trying to remember what had happened to him. That fingernail, or claw, had scratched his face. He had been drugged. It seemed obvious. He could remember his roaring senses as he had tried to fight, with the drug overcoming him. . . .

The room had a small door, and a single round window, like a bullseye pane of thick lens. Outside there was darkness, with points of stars. His head was still humming from the remaining effect of the drug. Or was the humming an outside noise? He was aware, as he got to his feet and staggered to the door, that the humming was distantly outside the room. The door was locked; its lever resisted his efforts to turn it.

There he saw the inert figures of the girl, and Tom Franklin. They were lying uninjured on two other small couches against the room's metal wall. The girl stirred a little as he touched her dank forehead. Her dyed blonde hair had fallen disheveled to her shoulders. Franklin lay sprawled, his stiff

white shirt bosom dirty and rumpled, his thin sandy hair dangling over his flushed face. His slack mouth was open. He was breathing heavily.

At the lens-window Lee stood gasping, his mind still confused and blurred, trying to encompass what was out there. This was a spaceship! A small globular thing of the white metal. He could see a rim of it, like a flat ring some ten feet beneath him. A spaceship, and obviously it had left the Earth! There was a black firmament — dead-black monstrous abyss with white blazing points of stars. And then, down below and to one side there was just an edge of a great globe visible. The Earth, with the sunlight edging its sweeping crescent limb—the Earth, down there with a familiar coastline and a huge spread of ocean like a giant map in monochrome.

Back on the couch Lee sat numbed. There was the sound of scraping metal; a doorslide in the wall opened. A face was there—a man with a blur of opalescent light behind him.

"You are all right now?" a voice said.

"Yes. I guess so. Let me out of here—"

Let him out of here? To do what? To make them head this thing back to Earth. . . . To Lee Anthony as he sat confused, the very thoughts were a fantasy. . . . Off the Earth! Out in Space! So often he had read of it, as a future scientific possibility—but with this actuality now his mind seemed hardly to grasp it. . . .

The man's voice said gently, "We cannot trust you. There must be no fighting—"

"I won't fight. What good could it do me?"

"You did fight. That was bad—that was frightening. We must not harm you—"

"Where are we going?" Lee murmured. "Why in the devil—"

"We think now it is best to say nothing. We will give you food through here. And over there—behind you—a little doorslide is to another room. You and these other two can be comfortable—"

"For how long?" Lee demanded.

"It should not seem many days. Soon we shall go fast. Please watch it at the window—he would want that. You have been taught some science?"

"Yes. I guess so."

TO LEE it was a weird, unnatural exchange between captor and captive. The voice, intoning the English words so slowly, so carefully, seemed gentle, concerned with his welfare . . . and afraid of him.

Abruptly the doorslide closed again, and then at once it reopened.

"He would want you to understand what you see," the man said. "You will find it very wonderful—we did, coming down here. This was his room —so long ago when he used it. His dials are there—you can watch them and try to understand. Dials to mark our distance and our size. The size-change will start soon."

Size-change? Lee's numbed mind turned over the words and found them almost meaningless.

"From the window there—what you can see will be very wonderful," the man said again. "He would want you to study it. Please do that."

The doorslide closed. . . .

What you can see from the window will be very wonderful. No one, during the days that followed could adequately describe what Lee Anthony and Thomas Franklin and Vivian saw through that lens-window. A vast p a n o r a m a in monochrome . . . a

soundless drama of the stars, so immense, so awesome that the human mind could grasp only an infinitesimal fragment of its wonders. . . .

They found the little door which led into another apartment. There were tables and chairs of earth-style, quaintly old-fashioned. Food and drink were shoved through the doorslide; the necessities of life and a fair comfort of living were provided. But their questions, even as the time passed and lengthened into what on Earth might have been a week or more, remained unanswered. There was only that gentle but firm negation:

"We have decided that he would want us to say nothing. We do not know about this girl and this smaller man. We brought them so that they could not remain on Earth to talk of having seen us. We are sorry about that. He may not like it."

"He? Who the devil are you talking about?" Franklin demanded. "See here, if I had you fellows back on Earth now I'd slam you into jail. Damned brigands. You can't do this to me! My—my father's one of the most important men in New York—"

But the doorslide quietly closed.

A week? It could have been that, or more. In a wall recess of the room Lee found a line of tiny dials with moving pointers. Miles—thousands of miles. A million; ten million; a hundred million. A light-year; tens; thousands. And, for the size-change, a normal diameter, Unit 1—and then up into thousands.

For hours at a time, silent, awed beyond what he had ever conceived the emotion of awe could mean, he sat at the lens-window, staring out and trying to understand.

THE globe-ship was some five hundred thousand miles out from Earth when the size-change of the weird little vehicle began. It came to Lee with a sudden shock to his senses, his head reeling, and a tingling within him as though every fibre of his being were suddenly stimulated into a new activity.

"Well, my Gawd," Vivian gasped. "What're they doin' to us now?"

The three of them had been warned by a voice through the doorslide, so that they sat together on one of the couches, waiting for what would happen.

"This—I wish they wouldn't do it," Franklin muttered. "Damn them—I want to get out of here."

Fear seemed to be Franklin's chief emotion now—fear and a petty sense of personal outrage that all this could be done to him against his will. Often, when Lee and the girl were at the window, Franklin had sat brooding, staring at his feet.

"Easy," Lee said. "It evidently won't hurt us. We're started in size-change. The globe, and everything in it, is getting larger."

Weird. The grey metal walls of the room were glowing now with some strange current which suffused them. The starlight from the window-lens mingled with an opalescent sheen from the glowing walls. It was like an aura, bathing the room—an aura which seemed to penetrate every smallest cell-particle of Lee's body—stimulating it. . . .

Size-change! Vaguely, Lee could fathom how it was accomplished; his mind went back to many scientific articles he had read on the theory of it — only theory, those imaginative scientific pedants had considered it; and yet now it was a reality upon him! He recalled the learned phrases the writers had used. . . . The *state of matter*. In all the Universe, the inherent factors which govern the state of

matter yield most readily to a change. An electronic charge—a current perhaps akin to, but certainly not identical with electricity, would change the state of all organic and inorganic substances . . . a rapid duplication of the fundamental entities within the electrons—and electrons themselves, so unsubstantial—mere whirlpools of nothingness!

A rapid duplication of the fundamental whirlpools—that would add size. The complete substance—with shape unaltered—would grow larger.

All just theory, but here, now, it was brought to an accomplished fact. Within himself, Lee could feel it. But as yet, he could not see it. The glowing room and everything in it was so weirdly luminous, there was no alteration in shape. These objects, the figure of Vivian beside him, and the pallid frightened Franklin, relative to each other they were no different from before. And the vast panorama of starry Universe beyond the lens-window, the immense distances out there, made any size-change as yet unperceivable.

BUT the size-change had begun, there was no question of it. With his senses steadying, Lee crossed the room. O weird feeling of lightness was upon him; he swayed as he stood before the little line of dials in the wall-recess. Five hundred thousand miles from Earth. More than twice the distance of the Moon. The globe had gone that far, with accelerating velocity so that now the pointers marked a hundred thousand miles an hour—out beyond the Moon, heading for the orbit-line of Mars. Now the size-change pointers were stirring. Unit One, the size this globe had been as it rested on Earth, fifty feet in height, and some thirty feet at its mid-section bulge. Already that unit was two, a globe—which, if it were on Earth, would be a hundred feet high. And Lee himself? He would be a giant more than twelve feet tall now. . . . He stood staring at the dials for a moment or two. That little pointer of the first of the size-change dials was creeping around. An acceleration! Another moment and it had touched Unit four. A two hundred foot globe. And Lee, if he had been on Earth, would already be a towering human nearly twenty-five feet in height!

Behind him, he heard Franklin suddenly muttering, "If only I could change without everything else changing! Damn them all—what I could do—"

"You're nuts," Vivian said. "I don't see anything growing bigger—everything here—jus' the same." Her laugh was abruptly hysterical. "This room—you two—you look like ghosts. Say, maybe we're all dead an' don't know it."

Queerly her words sent a shiver through Lee. He turned, stared blankly at her. This weird thing! The electronic light streaming from these walls had a stroboscopic quality. The girl's face was greenish, putty-colored, and her teeth shone phosphorescent.

Maybe we're all dead and don't know it. . . . Lee knew that this thing was a matter of cold, precise, logical science. . . . Yet who shall say but what mysticism is not mingled with science? A thing, which if we understood it thoroughly, would be as logical, as precise as the mathematics of science itself? Death? Who shall say what, of actuality, Death may be. A leaving of the mortal shell? A departure from earthly substance? A new state of being? Surely some of those elements were here now. And, logically, why could there not be a state of being

not all Death, but only with some of its elements?

"I—I don't like this," Franklin suddenly squealed. On the couch he sat hunched, trembling. "Something wrong here—Lee—damn you Lee—don't you feel it?"

Lee tried to smile calmly. "Feel what?"

"We're not—not alone here," Franklin stammered. "Not just you and Vivian and me—something else is here—something you can't see, but you can almost feel. An' I don't like it—"

A presence. Was there indeed something else here, of which now in this new state of being, they were vaguely aware? Something—like a fellow voyager—making this weird journey with them? Lee's heart was so wildly beating that it seemed smothering him.

UNIT Ten . . . Twenty . . . a Hundred. . . . With steady acceleration, the lowest size-change pointer was whirling, and the one above it was moving. The globe was five thousand feet high now. And on Earth Lee would have been a monstrous Titan over six hundred feet tall. A globe, and humans in that tremendous size—the very weight of them—in a moment more of this growth—would disarrange the rotation of the Earth on its axis! . . .

And then abruptly Lee found himself envisaging the monstrous globe out here in Space. A thing to disarrange the mechanics of all the Celestial Universe! In an hour or two, with this acceleration of growth, the globe would be a huge meteorite—then an asteroid. . . .

He stared at the distance dials. With the growth had come an immense augmentation of velocity. A hundred thousand miles an hour—that had been accelerated a hundred fold now. Ten million miles an hour. . . . Through the window-lens Lee gazed, mute with awe. The size-change was beginning to show! Far down, and to one side the crescent Earth was dwindling . . . Mars was far away in another portion of its orbit—the Moon was behind the Earth. There were just the myriad blazing giant worlds of the stars—infinitely remote, with vast distances of inky void between them. And now there was a visible movement to the stars! A sort of shifting movement. . . .

An hour. . . . A day. . . . A week. . . . Who shall try and describe what Lee Anthony beheld during that weird outward journey? . . . For a brief time, after they swept past the orbit of Mars, the great planets of Jupiter and Saturn were almost in a line ahead of the plunging, expanding globe. A monstrous thing now—with electronically charged gravity-plates so that it plunged onward by its own repellant force—the repellant force of the great star-field beneath it.

LEE stared at Jupiter, a lead-colored world with its red spot like a monster's single glaring eye. With the speed of light Jupiter was advancing, swinging off to one side with a visible flow of movement, and dropping down into the lower void as the globe went past it. Yet, as it approached, visually it had not grown larger. Instead, there was a steady dwindling. A dwindling of great Saturn, with its gorgeous, luminous rings came next. These approaching planets, seeming to shrink! Because, with Lee's expanding viewpoint, everything in the vast scene was shrinking! Great distances here, in relation to the giant globe, were dwindling! These millions of miles between Saturn and Jupiter had shrunk into thousands. And then were shrinking to hundreds.

Abruptly, with a startled shock to his senses, Lee's viewpoint changed. Always before he had instinctively conceived himself to be his normal six foot earthly size. The starry Universe was vast beyond his conception. And in a second now, that abruptly was altered. He conceived the vehicle as of actuality it was—a globe as large as the ball of Saturn itself! And simultaneously he envisaged the present reality of Saturn. Out in the inky blackness it hung—not a giant ringed world millions of miles away, but only a little ringed ball no bigger than the spaceship—a ringed ball only eight or ten times as big as Lee himself. It hung there for an instant beside them —only a mile or so away perhaps. And as it went past, with both distance and size-change combining now, it shrank with amazing rapidity! A ball only as big as this room. . . . Then no larger than Lee it hung, still seemingly no further away than before. And then in a few minutes more, a mile out there in the shrinking distance, it was a tiny luminous point, vanishing beyond his vision.

Uranus, little Nepune—Pluto, almost too far away in its orbit to be seen —all of them presently were dwindled and gone. Lee had a glimpse of the Solar system, a mere bunch of lights. The Sun was a tiny spot of light, holding its little family of tiny planets—a mother hen with her brood. It was gone in a moment, lost like a speck of star-dust among the giant starry worlds.

Another day—that is a day as it would have been on Earth. But here was merely a progressing of human existence—a streaming forward of human consciousness. The Light-year dial-pointers were all in movement now. By Earth standards of size and velocity, long since had the globe's velocity reached and passed the speed of light. Lee had been taught—his book-learning colored by the Einstein postulates—that there could be no speed greater than the speed of light—by Earth standards—perhaps, yes. The globe —by comparison with its original fifty-foot earth-size—might still be traveling no more than a few hundred thousand miles an hour. But this monster—a thing now as big as the whole Solar System doubtless—was speeding through a light-year in a moment!

Futile figures! The human mind can grasp nothing of the vastness of inter-steller space. To Lee it was only a shrinking inky void—an emptiness crowded with whirling little worlds all dwindling . . . This crowded space! Often little points of star-dust had come whirling at the globe—colliding, bursting into pin-points of fire. Each of them might have been bigger than the Earth.

There was a time when it seemed that beneath the globe all the tiny stars were shrinking into one lens-shaped cluster. The Inter-steller Universe all congealed down there into a blob, and everywhere else there was just nothingness . . . But then little distant glowing nebulae were visible—luminous floating rings, alone in the emptiness . . . Distant? One of them drifted past, seemingly only a few hundred feet away—a luminous little ring of star-dust. The passage of the monstrous globe seemed to hurl it so that like a blown smoke ring it went into chaos, lost its shape, and vanished.

Then at last all the blobs—each of them, to Earth-size conception, a monstrous Universe—all were dwindled into one blob down to one side of Lee's window. And then they were gone . . .

JUST darkness now. Darkness and soundless emptiness. But as he

stared at intervals through another long night of his human consciousness, Lee seemed to feel that the emptiness out there was dwindling—a finite emptiness. He noticed, presently, that the size-change pointers had stopped their movement; the ultimate size of the globe had been reached. The figures of the Light-year dials were meaningless to his comprehension. The velocity was meaningless. And now another little set of dials were in operation. A thousand—something—of distance. There was a meaningless word which named the unit. A thousand Earth-miles, if he had been in his former size? The pointer marked nine hundred in a moment. Was it, perhaps, the distance now from their destination?

Vivian was beside him. "Lee, what's gonna happen to us? Won't this come to an end some time? Lee—you won't let anybody hurt me?"

She was like a child, almost always clinging to him now. And suddenly she said a very strange thing. "Lee, I been thinkin'—back there on Earth I was doin' a lot of things that maybe were pretty rotten—anglin' for his money for instance—an' not carin' much what I had to do to get it." She gestured at the sullen Franklin who was sitting on the couch. "You know—things like that. An' I been thinkin'—you suppose, when we get where we're goin' now, that'll be held against me?"

What a queer thing to say! She was like a child—and so often a child has an insight into that which is hidden from those more mature!

"I—don't know," Lee muttered.

From the couch, Franklin looked up moodily. "Whispering about me again? I know you are—damn you both. You and everybody else here."

"We're not interested in you," Vivian said.

"Oh, you're not? Well you were, back on Earth. I'm not good enough for you now, eh? He's better—because he's big—big and strong—that the idea? Well if I ever had the chance—"

"Don't be silly," Lee said.

THE sullen Franklin was working himself into a rage. Lee seemed to understand Franklin better now. A weakling. Inherently, with a complex of inferiority, the vague consciousness of it lashing him into baffled anger.

"You, Anthony," Franklin burst out, "don't think you've been fooling me. You can put it over that fool girl, but not me. I'm onto you."

"Put what over?" Lee said mildly.

"That you don't know anything about this affair or these men who've got us—you don't know who they are, do you?"

"No. Do you?" Lee asked.

Franklin jumped to his feet. "Don't fence with me. By God, if I was bigger I'd smash your head in. They abducted us, because they wanted you. That fellow said as much near the start of this damned trip. They won't talk—afraid I'll find out. And you can't guess what it's all about! The hell you can't."

Lee said nothing. But there was a little truth in what Franklin was saying, of course. . . . Those things that the dying old Anna Green had told him—surely this weird voyage had some connection.

He turned away; went back to the window. There was a sheen now. A vague outline of something vast, as though the darkness were ending at a great wall that glowed a little.

It seemed, during that next time-interval, as though the globe might have turned over, so that now it was dropping down upon something tan-

gible. Dropping—floating down—with steadily decreasing velocity, descending to a Surface. The sheen of glow had expanded until now it filled all the lower hemisphere of darkness—a great spread of surface visually coming up. Then there were things to see, illumined by a faint half-light to which color was coming; a faint, pastel color that seemed a rose-glow.

"Why—why," Vivian murmured, "say, it's beautiful, ain't it? It looks like fairyland—or Heaven. It does—don't it, Lee?"

"Yes," Lee murmured. "Like—like—"

The wall-slide rasped. The voice of one of their captors said, "We will arrive soon. We can trust you—there must be no fighting."

"You can trust us," Lee said.

It was dark in the little curving corridor of the globe, where with silent robed figures around them, they stood while the globe gently landed. Then they were pushed forward, out through the exit port.

The new realm. The World Beyond. What was it? To Lee Anthony then came the feeling that there was a precise scientific explanation of it, of course. And yet, beyond all that pedantry of science, he seemed to know that it was something else, perhaps a place that a man might mould by his dreams. A place that would be what a man made of it, from that which was within himself.

Solemn with awe he went with his companions slowly down the incline.

CHAPTER III

Realm of Mystery

"WE WISH nothing of you," the man said, "save that you accept from us what we have to offer. You are hungry. You will let us bring you food."

It was a simple, rustic room to which they had been brought—a room in a house seemingly of plaited straw. Crude furnishings were here—table and chairs of Earth fashion, padded with stuffed mats. Woven matting was on the floor. Through a broad latticed window the faint rose-light outside—like a soft pastel twilight—filtered in, tinting the room with a gentle glow. Thin drapes at the window stirred in a breath of breeze—a warm wind from the hills, scented with the vivid blooms which were everywhere.

It had been a brief walk from the space-globe. Lee had seen what seemed a little village stretching off among the trees. There had been people crowding to see the strangers—men, women and children, in simple crude peasant garb—brief garments that revealed their pink-white bodies. They babbled with strange unintelligible words, crowding forward until the robed men from the globe shoved them away.

It was a pastoral, peaceful scene—a little countryside drowsing in the warm rosy twilight. Out by the river there were fields where men stood at their simple agricultural implements—stood at rest, staring curiously at the commotion in the village.

And still Lee's captors would say nothing, merely drew them forward, into this room. Then all of them left, save one. He had doffed his robe now. He was an old man, with long grey-white hair to the base of his neck. He stood smiling. His voice, with the English words queerly pronounced, was gentle, but with a firm finality of command.

"My name is Arkoh," he said. "I am to see that you are made comfort-

able. This house is yours. There are several rooms, so that you may do in them as you wish."

"Thank you," Lee said. "But you can certainly understand—I have asked many questions and never had any answers. If you wish to talk to me alone—"

"That will come presently. There is no reason for you to be worried—"

"We're not worried," Franklin burst out. "We're fed up with this high-handed stuff. You'll answer questions now. What I demand to know is why—"

"Take it easy," Lee warned.

Franklin had jumped to his feet. He flung off Lee's hand. "Don't make me laugh. I know you're one of them—everything about you is a fake. You got us into this—"

"So? You would bring strife here from your Earth?" Arkoh's voice cut in, like a knife-blade cleaving through Franklin's bluster. "That is not permissible. Please do not make it necessary that there should be violence here." He stood motionless. But before his gaze Franklin relaxed into an incoherent muttering.

"Thank you," Arkoh said. "I shall send you the food." He turned and left the room.

VIVIAN had collapsed into a chair. She was trembling. "Well— my Gawd—what is all this? Lee—that old man with his gentle voice—he looked like if you crossed him you'd be dead. Not that he'd hurt you—it would be—would be something else—"

"You talk like an ass," Franklin said. "You've gone crazy—and I don't blame you—this damned weird thing. For all that old man's smooth talk, we're just prisoners here. Look outside that window—"

It was a little garden, drowsing in the twilight. A man stood watching the window. And as Lee went to the lattice, he could see others, like guards outside.

The man who brought their simple food was a stalwart fellow in a draped garment of brown plaited fibre. His black hair hung thick about his ears. He laid out the food in silence.

"What's *your* name?" Franklin demanded.

"I am Groff."

"And you won't talk either, I suppose? Look here, I can make it worth your while to talk."

"Everyone has all he needs here. There is nothing that you need give us."

"Isn't there? You just give me a chance and I'll show you. No one has all he needs—or all he wants."

Groff did not answer. But as he finished placing the food and left the room, it seemed to Lee that he shot a queer look back at Franklin. A look so utterly incongruous that it was startling. Franklin saw it and chuckled.

"Well, at least there's one person here who's not so damn weird that it gives you the creeps."

"You don't know what you're talking about," Lee said. With sudden impulse he lowered his voice. "Franklin, listen—there are a few things that perhaps I can tell you. Things that I can guess—that Vivian senses—"

"I don't want to hear your explanation. It would be just a lot of damn lies anyway."

"All right. Perhaps it would. We'll soon know, I imagine."

"Let's eat," Vivian said. "I'm hungry, even if I am scared."

To Lee it seemed that the weird hystery here was crowding upon them. As though, here in this dim room, momentous things were waiting to reveal themselves. A strange emotion was upon

Lee Anthony. A sort of tense eagerness. Certainly it was not fear. Certainly it seemed impossible that there could be anything here of which he should be afraid. Again his mind went back to old Anna Green and what she had hold him of his grandfather. How far away—how long ago that had been. . . . And yet, was Anna Green far away now? Something of her had seemed always to be with him on that long, weird voyage, from the infinite smallness and pettiness of Earth to this realm out beyond the stars. And more than ever now, somehow Lee seemed aware of her presence here in this quiet room. Occultism? He had always told himself that surely he was no mystic. A practical fellow, who could understand science when it was taught him, but certainly never could give credence to mysticism. The dead are dead, and the living are alive; and between them is a gulf—an abyss of nothingness.

BUT now he found himself wondering. Were all those people on Earth who claimed to feel the presence of dead loved ones near them? Were those people just straining their fancy—just comforting themselves with what they wished to believe? Or was the scoffer himself the fool? And if that could be so, on Earth, why could not this strange realm be of such a quality that an awareness of those who have passed from life would be the normal thing? Who shall say that the mysteries of life and death are unscientific? Was it not rather that they embraced those gaps of science not yet understood? Mysteries which, if only we could understand them, would be mysteries no longer?

Lee had left the table and again was standing at the latticed window, beyond which the drowsing little garden lay silent, and empty now. The guard who had been out here had moved further away; his figure was a blob near a flowered thicket at the house corner. And suddenly Lee was aware of another figure. There was a little splashing fountain near the garden's center—a rill of water which came down a little embankment and splashed into a pool where the roselight shimmered on the ripples.

The figure was sitting at the edge of the pool—a slim young girl in a brief dress like a drape upon her. She sat, half reclining on the bank by the shimmering water, with her long hair flowing down over her shoulders and a lock of it trailing in the pool. For a moment he thought that she was gazing into the water. Then as the light which tinted her graceful form seemed to intensify, he saw that she was staring at him.

It seemed as though both of them, for that moment, were breathless with a strange emotion awakened in them by the sight of each other. And then slowly the girl rose to her feet. Still gazing at Lee, she came slowly forward with her hair dangling, framing her small oval face. The glow in the night-air tinted her features. It was a face of girlhood, almost mature—a face with wonderment on it now.

He knew that he was smiling; and, as a few feet from the window she stopped, she said shyly:

"You are Lee Anthony?"

"Yes."

"I am Aura. When you have finished eating, I am to take you to him."

"To him?"

"Yes. The One of Our Guidance. He bade me bring you." Her soft voice was musical; to her, quite obviously, the English was a foreign tongue.

"I'm ready," Lee said. "I'm finished."

One of her slim bare arms went up with a gesture. From the corner of the little house the guard there turned, came inside. Lee turned to the room. The guard entered. "You are to come," he said.

"So we just stay here, prisoners," Franklin muttered. He and Vivian were blankly staring as Lee was led away.

Then in a moment he was alone beside the girl who had come for him. Silently they walked out into the glowing twilight, along a little woodland path with the staring people and the rustic, nestling dwellings blurring in the distance behind them. A little line of wooded hills lay ahead. The sky was like a dark vault—empty. The pastel light on the ground seemed inherent to the trees and the rocks; it streamed out like a faint radiation from everywhere. And then, as Lee gazed up into the abyss of the heavens, suddenly it seemed as though very faintly he could make out a tiny patch of stars. Just one small cluster, high overhead.

"The Universe you came from," Aura said.

"Yes." The crown of her tresses as she walked beside him was at his shoulder. He gazed down at her. "To whom are you taking me? It seems that I could guess—"

"I was told not to talk of that."

"Well, all right. Is it far?"

"No. A little walk—just to that nearest hill."

Again they were silent. "My Earth," he said presently, "do you know much about it?"

"A little. I have been told."

"It seems so far away to me now."

SHE gazed up at him. She was smiling. "Is it? To me it seems quite close." She gestured. "Just up there. It seemed far to you, I suppose—that was because you were so small, for so long, coming here."

Like a man the size of an ant, trying to walk ten miles. Of course, it would be a monstrous trip. But if that man were steadily to grow larger, as he progressed he would cover the distance very quickly.

"Well," Lee said, "I suppose I can understand that. You were born here, Aura?"

"Yes. Of course."

"Your world here—what is it like?"

She gazed up at him as though surprised. "You have seen it. It is just a simple little place. We have not so many people here in the village, and about that many more—those who live in the hills close around here."

"You mean that's all? Just this village? Just a few thousand people?"

"Oh there are others, of course. Other groups—like ours, I guess—out in the forests—everywhere in all the forests, maybe." Her gesture toward the distant, glowing, wooded horizons was vague. "We have never tried to find out. Why should we? Wherever they are, they have all that they need, or want. So have we."

The thing was so utterly simple. He pondered it. "And you—you're very happy here?"

Her wide eyes were childlike. "Why yes. Of course. Why not? Why should not everyone be happy?"

"Well," he said, "there are things—"

"Yes. I have heard of them. Things on your Earth—which the humans create for themselves—but that is very silly. We do not have them here."

Surely he could think of no retort to such childlike faith. Her faith. How horribly criminal it would be to destroy it. A priceless thing—human happiness to be created out of the faith that it was the normal thing. He realized that his heart was pounding, as though now

things which had been dormant within him all his life were coming out—clamoring now for recognition.

And then, out of another silence he murmured, "Aura—you're taking me to my grandfather, aren't you? He came here from Earth—and then he sent back there to get me?"

"Yes," she admitted. "So you know it? But I was instructed—"

"All right. We won't talk of it. And he's told you about me?"

"Yes," she agreed shyly. She caught her breath as she added, "I have been —waiting for you—a long time." Shyly she gazed up at him. The night-breeze had blown her hair partly over her face. Her hand brushed it away so that her gaze met his. "I hoped you would be, well, like you are," she added.

"Oh," he said awkwardly. "Well—thanks."

"And you," she murmured out of another little silence, "you—I hope I haven't disappointed you. I am—like you wished—"

What a weird thing to say! He smiled. "Not ever having heard of you, Aura, I can't exactly say that I—"

HE CHECKED himself. Was she what he had wished? Why yes—surely he had been thinging of her—in his dreams, all his life vaguely picturing something like this for Lee Anthony. . . .

"I guess I have been thinking of you," he agreed. "No, you haven't disappointed me, Aura. You—you are—"

He could find no words to say it. "We are almost there," she said. "He will be very happy to have you come. He is a very good man, Lee. The one, we think, of the most goodness—and wiseness, to guide us all—"

The path had led them up a rocky defile, with gnarled little trees growing between the crags. Ahead, the hillside rose up in a broken, rocky cliff. There was a door, like a small tunnel entrance. A women in a long white robe was by the door.

"He is here," Aura said. "Young Anthony."

"You go in."

Silently they passed her. The tunnel entrance glowed with the pastel radiance from the rocks. The radiance was a soft blob of color ahead of them.

"You will find that he cannot move now," Aura whispered. "You will sit by his bed. And talk softly."

"You mean—he's ill?"

"Well—what you would call paralysis. He cannot move. Only his lips—his eyes. He will be gone from us soon, so that then he can only be unseen. A Visitor—"

Her whisper trailed off. Lee's heart was pounding, seeming to thump in his throat as Aura led him silently forward. It was a draped, cave-like little room. Breathless, Lee stared at a couch—a thin old figure lying there—a frail man with white hair that framed his wrinkled face. It was a face that was smiling, its sunken, burning eyes glowing with a new intensity. The lips moved; a faint old voice murmured:

"And you—you are Lee?"

"Yes—grandfather—"

He went slowly forward and sat on the bedside.

CHAPTER IV

Mad Giant

TO LEE, after a moment, his grandfather seemed not awe-inspiring, but just a frail old man, paralyzed into almost complete immobility, lying here almost pathetically happy to have his grandson at last with him. An old man, with nothing of the mystic about him—an old man who had been—unknown

to the savants of his Earth—perhaps the greatest scientist among them. Quietly, with pride welling in him, Lee held the wasted, numbed hand of his grandfather and listened. . . .

Phineas Anthony, the scientist. After many years of research, spending his own private fortune, he had evolved the secret of size-change—solved the intricate problems of anti-gravitational spaceflight; and combining the two, had produced that little vehicle.

A man of science; and perhaps more than that. As old Anna Green had said, perhaps he was a man inspired—a man, following his dreams, his convictions, convinced that somewhere in God's great creation of things that are, there must be an existence freed of those things by which Man himself so often makes human life a tortured hell.

"And Something led me here, Lee," the gentle old voice was saying. "Perhaps not such a coincidence. On this great Inner Surface of gentle light and gentle warmth—with Nature offering nothing against which one must strive—there must be many groups of simple people like these. They have no thought of evil—there is nothing—no one, to teach it to them. If I had not landed here, I think I would have found much the same thing almost anywhere else on the Inner Surface."

"The Inner Surface? I don't understand, grandfather."

A conception—a reality here—that was numbing in its vastness. This was the concave, inner surface, doubtless deep within the atom of some material substance. A little empty Space here, surrounded by solidity.

"And that—" Lee murmured, "then that little space is our Inter-Stellar abyss?"

"Yes. Of course. The stars, as we call them—from here you could call them tiny particles — like electrons whirling. All of them in this little void. With good eyesight, you can sometimes see them there—"

"I did."

And to this viewpoint which Lee had now—so gigantic, compared to Earth—all the Inter-Stellar universe was a void here of what old Anthony considered would be perhaps eight or ten thousand miles. A void, to Lee now, was itself of no greater volume than the Earth had been to him before!

Silently he pondered it. This Inner Surface—not much bigger, to him now, than the surface of the Earth is to its humans. . . . Suddenly he felt small—infinitely tiny. Out here beyond the stars, he was only within the atom of something larger, a human, partly on his way—emerging—outward—

IT GAVE him a new vague conception. As though now, because he was partly emerged, the all-wise Creator was giving him a new insight. Surely in this simple form of existence humans were totally unaware of what evil could be. Was not this a higher form of life than down there on his tiny Earth?

The conception numbed him with awe . . .

"You see, Lee, I have been looking forward to having you become a man—to having you here," old Anthony was saying. As he lay, so utterly motionless, only his voice, his face, his eyes, seemed alive. It was an amazingly expressive old face, radiant, transfigured. "I shall not be here long. You see? And when I have—gone on—when I can only come back here as a Visitor—like Anna Green, you have been aware of her, Lee?"

"Yes, grandfather. Yes, I think I have."

"The awareness is more acute, here, than it was back on Earth. A very

comforting thing, Lee. I was saying—I want you here. These people, so simple—you might almost think them childlike—they need someone to guide them. The one who did that—just as I came, was dying. Maybe—maybe that is what led me here. So now I need you."

It welled in Lee with an awe, and a feeling suddenly of humbleness—and of his own inadequacy, so that he murmured,

"But grandfather—I would do my best—but surely—"

"I think it will be given you—the ability—and I've been thinking, Lee, if only some time it might be possible to show them on Earth—"

Lee had been aware that he and old Anthony were alone here. When Lee entered, Aura had at once withdrawn. Now, interrupting his grandfather's faint, gentle voice there was a commotion outside the underground apartment. The sound of women's startled cries, and Aura's voice.

Then Aura burst in, breathless, pale, with her hair flying and on her face and in her eyes a terror so incongruous that Lee's heart went cold.

He gasped, "Aura! Aura, what is it?"

"This terrible thing—that man who came with you—that man, Franklin—he talked with Groff. Some evil spell to put upon Groff—it could only have been that—"

Lee seized her. "What do you mean? Talk slower. Groff? The man who served us that meal—"

"Yes, Groff. And two of the men who were to guard there. What that man said to them—did to them—and when old Arkoh found it out he opposed them—" Her voice was drab with stark horror—so new an emotion that it must have confused her, so that now she just stood trembling.

"Child, come here—come here over to me—" Old Anthony's voice summoned her. "Now—talk more slowly—try and think what you want to tell us . . . What happened?"

"Oh—I saw old Arkoh—him whom I love so much—who always has been so good to me—to us all—I saw him lying there on the floor—"

WORDS so unnatural here that they seemed to reverberate through the little cave-room with echoes that jostled and muttered like alien, menacing things which had no right here—and yet, were here.

"You saw him—lying there?" Lee prompted.

"Yes. His throat, with red blood running out of it where they had cut him—and he was dying—he died while I stood there—"

The first murder. A thing so unnatural. Old Anthony stared for an instant mute at the girl who now had covered her face with her hands as she trembled against Lee.

"Killed him?" Lee murmured.

On Anthony's face there was wonderment—disillusion, and then bitterness. "So? This is what comes to us, from Earth?"

Lying so helpless, old Anthony could only murmur that now Lee must do what he could.

"Your own judgment, my son—do what you can to meet this." The sunken, burning eyes of the old man flashed. "If there must be violence here, let it be so. Violence for that which is right."

"Grandfather—yes! That miserable cowardly murderer—"

To meet force, with force. Surely, even in a world of ideals, there is no other way.

With his fists clenched, Lee ran from the cave-room. Frightened women scat-

tered before him at its entrance. Where had Franklin gone? That fellow Groff, and two or three of the guards had gone with him. Cynicism swept Lee; he remembered the look Groff had flung at Franklin. Even here in this realm—because it was peopled by humans—evil passions could brood. Groff indeed must have been planning something, and he had seen in Franklin a ready helper—a man from Earth, whom Groff very well may have thought would be more resourceful, more experienced in the ways of violence than himself.

This realm where everyone had all of happiness that he could want! Human perfection of existence. A savage laugh of irony was within Lee as he thought of it. No one had ever held out the offer of more than perfection to these people. But Franklin evidently had done it—playing upon the evil which must lie within every living thing, no matter how latent it may be. Awakening in those guards the passion of cupidity—desire for something better than they had now.

WHAT had happened to Vivian? Out in the roselight dimness, a little way down the path, Lee found himself staring off toward the forest where the village lay nestled. Voices of the frightened people came wafting through the night silence.

"Lee—Lee—"

It was Aura behind him, running after him. "Lee—wait—I belong with you. You know that—"

He gripped her. "That girl from Earth—that Vivian she was with Franklin. What happened to her?"

"She went. He took her—"

"She went—voluntarily?"

"Yes. The people saw her running out with Franklin, and Groff and the other men. Oh, Lee—what—what are you going to do?"

"I don't know." He stood for a moment dazed, confused—panting, his fingers twitching. If only he could get a grip on Franklin's throat. And so Vivian went too! That was a laugh—girl of the streets, pretty worthless, on Earth. But here—she had seemed to sense what this realm could mean.

"Aura, where would Groff be likely to go?"

"Go? Why—why I do remember, Groff often went up into the hills. He never said why."

"Would they have any weapons?"

"Weapons?" Her eyes widened as though for a second she did not comprehend. "Weapons? You mean—instruments with which to kill people? No—how could there be? But a knife can kill. A knife cut old Arkoh's throat. We have knives—in the houses—and knives that are used for the harvests—"

She had turned to gaze out toward the glowing hills . . . "Oh, Lee—look—"

Numbed, with their breath catching in their throats, they stared. Out by the hills a man's figure rose up—monstrous, gigantic figure.

Franklin! He stood beside the little hill, with a hand on its top, his huge bulk dwarfing it! Franklin, a titan, his head and shoulders looming monstrously against the inky blackness of the sky!

CHAPTER V

Combat of Titans

AURA, you think you know where Groff may have gone—those times he went out into the hills?"

"Yes. I think so. Lee—that giant, I think now I understand what must have happened."

The giant shape of Franklin, a mile or two from them, had stood for a mo-

ment and then had receded, vanished momentarily as he moved backward behind the hills. Lee and Aura, stunned, still stood beside the little rocky path. Lee's mind was a turmoil of confusion, with only the knowledge that he must do something now, quickly. There were no weapons here in this peaceful little realm. Four or five of these madmen villains—what need had they of weapons? The monstrous power of size. The thought of it struck at Lee with a chill that seemed turning his blood to ice. The monster that Franklin had become—with a size like that he could scatter death with his naked hands.

"I remember now," Aura was gasping. "There was a time when your grandfather was working on his science. Groff was helping him then. Your grandfather taught Groff much."

"Working at what?"

"It was never said. Then your grandfather gave it up—he had decided it would not be wise here."

Some individual apparatus, with the size-change principle of the space-globe? And Groff had gotten the secret. An abnormality here — Groff, with the power of evil latent within him, tempted by this opportunity. What could he have hoped to accomplish? Of what use to him would it be to devastate this little realm? Bitter irony swept Lee. Of what use was vast personal power to anyone? Those madmen of Earth's history, with their lust for conquest—of what use could the conquest be to them? And yet they had plunged on.

He realized that with Groff there could have been a wider field of conquest. Groff had heard much of Earth. With the power of size here, he could master this realm; then seize the space-globe. Go with it to Earth. Why, in a gigantic size there, he and a few villainous companions could master the Earth-world. A mad dream indeed; but Lee knew it was a lustful possibility matched by many in Earth's history.

And then Franklin had come here. Franklin, with his knowledge of Earth which Groff would need. Franklin, with his inherent feeling of inferiority —his groping desire for the strength and power of size. What an opportunity for Franklin!

Lee heard himself saying out of the turmoil of his thoughts: "Then, Aura —out there in the hills they've got some apparatus, of course, which—"

His words were stricken away. From somewhere in the glowing dimness near at hand there was a groan. A gasping, choking groan; and the sound of something falling.

"Lee—over there—" Aura's whispered words were drab with horror.

A FIGURE which had been staggering among the rocks near them, had fallen. They rushed to it. Vivian! She was trying to drag herself forward. Her hair, streaming down in a sodden mass, was matted with blood. Her pallid face was blood-smeared. Her neck and throat were a welter of crimson horror. Beside her on the ground lay a strange-looking apparatus of grids and wires—a metal belt—a skeleton helmet. . . . She was gripping it with a blood-smeared hand, dragging it with her.

"Vivian—Vivian—"

"Oh—you, Lee? Thank Gawd—I got to you—"

Her elbows gave way; her head and shoulders sank to the rock. Faintly gasping, with blood-foam at her livid lips, she lay motionless. But her glazing eyes gazed up at Lee, and she was trying to smile.

"I went with them—that damned

Franklin—he thought I was as bad as him—" Her faint words were barely audible as he bent down over her. "Just want to tell you, Lee—you're perfectly swell—I guess I fell for you, didn't I? That's over now—just wanted you to know it anyway. There's one of the damned mechanisms they've got—"

"Where are they, Vivian?"

"A cave, not very far from here—down that little ravine—just ahead—they're in there—four or five of them, getting ready to—" Blood was rattling in her throat, choking her. She tried, horribly, to cough. And then she gasped:

"I stole this mechanism. He · Franklin—he caught me—slashed me. He thought I was dead, I guess—but—when he had gone, I got this mechanism—trying to get to you—"

Her choking, rattling breath again gave out. For a moment she lay with a paroxysm of death twitching her. And then, very faintly she gasped:

"Sort of nice—I was able to do one good thing — anyhow. I'm glad of that—"

The paroxysm in a moment ended. Her white lips were still trying to smile as the light went out of her eyes and she was gone. Trembling, Lee stood up, with the mute, white-faced Aura clinging to him. It was fairly obvious how the weird mechanism should be adjusted—anklets, the skeleton helmet of electrodes, the belt around his waist, with its grids, tiny dials and curved battery box. In a moment he stood with the wires strung from his head, to wrists, ankles and waist. There seemed but one little control switch that would slide over a metal arc of intensity contacts.

"Oh, Lee—what—what are you going to do—?" Aura stood white with terror.

"She said four or five of them in a cave near here perhaps they haven't yet gotten large—"

DOWN in a little ravine Lee found himself running forward in the luminous darkness. He called back, "Aura you stay where you are—you hide, until it's over —"

Then, in the turmoil of his mind, there was no thought of the girl. There was only the vision of old Anthony lying back there so helpless—his burning eyes bitter with this thing which had so horribly come to his little realm. To meet force with force was the only answer.

It was not Lee's plan to increase his size for a moment now. By doing that, almost at once he would be discovered. And perhaps there were still four or five of the murderers, still not giants, in a cave nearby.

The dim rocky ravine, heavy with shadows, led downward. He came to a tunnel opening, advancing more cautiously now. And then, as he turned an angle, abruptly ahead of him, down a little subterranean declivity a luminous cave was visible. Groff's hideout. At one of its entrances here Lee stood for an instant gasping. The five men were here—Groff and four of his villainous companions.

The five bodies lay strewn—horribly mangled. And the wreckage of their size-change mechanisms was strewn among them.

So obvious, what had happened! Franklin had been the first to get large. And at once he had turned on them. Franklin, the weakling who dared not have any rivalry! And now Franklin was outside, out in the hills, a raging, murderous monster. For a moment, in the grisly shambles of the little cave Lee stood transfixed. Then his hand was fumbling at his belt. He shoved

the small switch-lever.

There was a shock—a humming—a reeling of his senses. It was akin to what he had felt on the space-globe, but stronger, more intense now. For an instant he staggered, confused. The wires strung on him were glowing; he could feel their heat. Weird luminous opalescence streamed from them—it bathed him—strange electrolite radiance that permeated every minute fibre of his being.

With his head steadying, Lee suddenly was aware of movement all about him. The dim outlines of the cave-room were shrinking with a creeping, crawling movement. Cave-walls and roof all shrinking, dwindling, drawing down upon him. Under his feet the rocky ground seemed hitching forward.

This little cave! In a moment while he stood shocked into immobility, the cave was a tiny cell. Down by his feet the gruesome mangled corpses were the size of children. The cave-roof bumped his head. He must get out of here! The realization stabbed him. Why, in another moment or two these dark walls would close upon him! Then with instant changing viewpoint he saw the true actuality. He was a growing giant, crouching here underground—a giant who would be crushed, mangled by his own monstrous growth.

LEE turned, staggered into the little tunnel, shoved his way out. The walls pressed him; they seemed in a moment to close after him as he gained the outer glowing darkness. . . . There was only a narrow slit in the dwindling cliff to mark the tunnel entrance. Lee had the wits to crouch in a fairly open space as he stared at the dwindling trees, the little hills, all shrinking. Franklin must be around here somewhere. Franklin doubtless would see him in a moment.

And then as Lee rose up, Franklin saw him. Lee put a hand on one of the little hills at his waist, vaulted over it so that he faced Franklin with what seemed no more than a hundred feet between them. For that second Franklin was transfixed. Amazement swept his face. His muttering was audible:

"Why—why—what's this—"

An adversary had come to challenge his power. As Lee bounded forward, on Franklin's face while he stood transfixed, there was wonderment—disappointment—sudden instinctive fear—and then wild rage. He stooped; seized a boulder, hurled it at the oncoming Lee. It missed; and then Lee was on him, seizing him.

Franklin's body had not been enlarging, but as he saw Lee coming, his hand had flung his switch. They gripped each other now, swaying, locked together, staggering. Franklin still was more than head and shoulders above Lee. His huge arms, with amazing power in them, bent Lee backward. He stumbled, went down with Franklin on him. "Got you! Damn you," he said.

His giant hands gripped Lee's throat, but Lee was aware that his own body was enlarging faster than Franklin's, upon which the size-current had only now started to act. If Lee could only resist—just a little bit longer! His groping hand beside him on the ground seized a rock. Monstrous strangling fingers were at his throat—his breath was gone, his head roaring. Then he was aware that he had seized a rock and struck it up into Franklin's face. For a second the hands at Lee's throat relaxed. He gulped in air, desperately broke free and staggered to his feet.

But Franklin was up as quickly. The tiny forest trees crackled under Lee's tread as again he hurled himself on his antagonist. . . .

AT the head of the distant ravine, the numbed Aura crouched alone, staring out at the hills with mute horror — staring at the two monstrous giants slugging it out. Franklin was the larger. She saw Lee rise up, and with a hand on one of the hills, vault over it. Giants that loomed against the sky as they fronted each other and then crashed together, went down.

Lee was underneath! Dear God—

Two monstrous bodies—Lee was lying with a ridge of crags under his shoulders. . . . Franklin's voice was a blurred roar of triumph in the distance. Then she saw Lee's groping hand come up with a monstrous fifty foot boulder. He crashed it home.

They were up again. Their giant staggering lunges had carried them five miles from her. They were almost the size of fighting titans. The blurred distant shapes of them were silhouettes against the glow of the sky. The forest out there was crackling under their tread . . . a blurred roar of breaking, mangled trees. . . .

It was just a few seconds while Aura stared, but each second was an eternity of horror. Then one of the monstrous figures was toppling. A great boulder had crashed on Franklin's head; he had broken loose, staggering while Lee jumped backward and crouched.

For just a second the towering shape of the stricken Franklin loomed up in the sky. And then it fell crashing forward. A swift-flowing stream was there, and the body fell across it—blocking the water which dammed up, then turned aside and went roaring off through the mangled forest.

LEE, again in his former size, sat at old Anthony's bedside, with Aura behind him. The news of the combat out there against the sky had come to Anthony — the excitement of it, too much for his faltering old heart. . . .

"But you will be all right, grandfather. The thing is over now."

"Yes. All right of course, Lee. Just a visitor here—and you will take my place—"

He lay now—as old Anna Green had been that night—just on the brink. "Lee, listen to me—those mechanisms—the space-globe—Lee, I realize now there is no possibility that we could help Earth—and surely it could only bring us evil here. What we have found here—don't you see, back on Earth each man must create it for himself. Within himself. He could do that, if he chose. And so you—you must disconnect us—forever—"

"Yes, grandfather—"

"And I—guess that is all—"

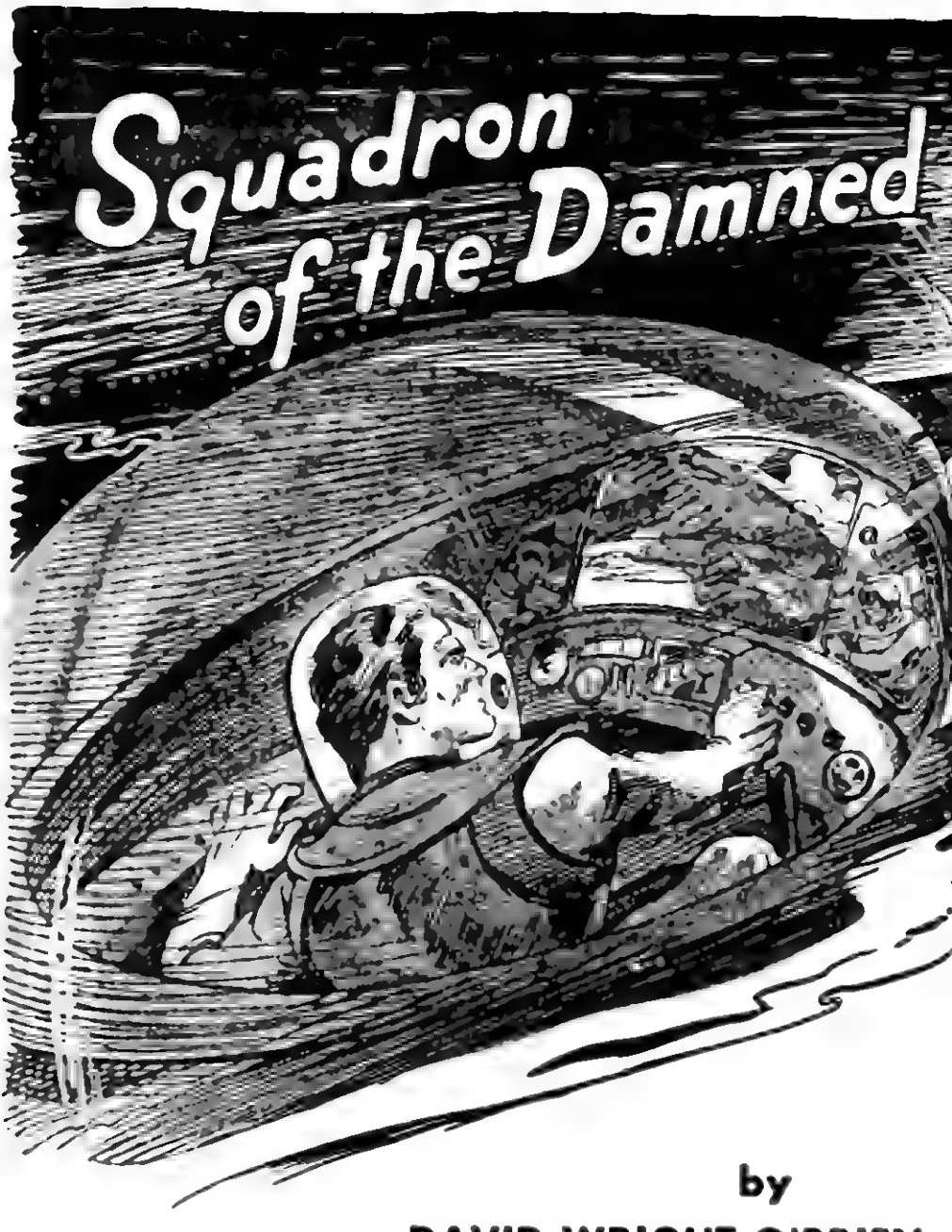
For so long he seemed to hover on the brink, while Lee and Aura, sitting hand in hand, silently watched him. And then he was gone.

THE last of the mechanisms irrevocably was smashed. The little line of vacuums and tubes of the space-globe's mechanisms went up into a burst of opalescent light under Lee's grim smashing blows.

Then silently he went outside and joined Aura. Behind them, down the declivity toward the village, the people were gathering. He was silent, his heart pounding with emotion, as he faced them from a little eminence — faced them and heard their shouts, and saw their arms go up to welcome him.

Slowly he and Aura walked down the slope toward his waiting people. And with her by his side, her hand in his, Lee Anthony knew then that he had found fulfillment—the attainment of that which is within every man's heart — man's heritage — those things for which he must never cease to strive.

THE END



by
DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

Ricky Werts joined the Space Patrol to clear his brother of a murder charge— and found himself assigned to hell itself

The outlaw's weapon flared in Ricky's face as he gripped the gun-trips in tense fingers

IT WAS a dingy, dirty interspacial tramp freighter that carried the quiet, expensively attired, serious expressioned young man to Barkay—that nethermost outpost of the civilized interplanetary belt—and deposited him, ornate luggage and all, on the filthy space wharf that was Barkay's only welcome mat to visitors.

The serious, expensively tuniced young man, had then inquired of an unkempt and somewhat besotted Martian wharf stevedore, the way to the nearest and least louse infested hotel. The stevedore appraised the young man's rich blue tunic, determined gray eyes, and costly trappings and grinningly gave him the information.

At the hotel, a drab, *duralloy,* rusted structure of ancient origin, the wrinkled little clerk at the *alumnoid* desk, subjected the gray-eyed young man to the same scrutiny, and ended with the same knowing grin.

"Name?" said the wrinkled clerk in a tone of voice that indicated any name would do.

The gray-eyed young traveler

thought a moment, while the wrinkled little clerk waited without impatience. It was generally like this. Most of them intended to use names other than their own. Some of them had them glibly prepared, and others—like this young fellow –found it hard to remember them.

"Richard Werts," he said hesitantly.

"From?" the clerk inquired, not looking up from his ledger.

"Earth," the young man said. "Western continent." There was the ring of truth to this. They generally didn't try to conceal the location from which they had come.

"A day and a night?" the clerk asked.

The young man nodded. "Yes, that should be sufficient."

"It generally is," the clerk agreed.

The young man gave him a sharp glance, but said nothing. He picked up his expensive luggage, took the room slip the clerk had handed him, and turned away.

The young man took three strides then stopped abruptly, turning back to the desk. The clerk raised his wrinkled brows.

"In the past four or five months," said the young man, "was there another chap, about my height, a little lighter, and with red hair and blue eyes, registered here?"

The clerk shrugged. "Four or five months is a long time."

The young man's straight mouth set impatiently. He dropped his luggage, secured his wallet, and peeled off several Martian *Klekas*. He folded them into a ball and hurled them to the top of the alumnoid desk. The clerk picked up the ball casually, smoothed out the currency and put it in his pocket.

"Yes," he said. "There was a young fellow, little older than you, maybe three years older. Registered four months ago. Day and a night. Gave the same last name as you did."

The young man looked up. "Same as I?"

The clerk nodded. "Werts," he said. "Funny, ain't it?"

The young man considered this unsmilingly. "What first name?" he asked.

The clerk bent down behind his battered desk. He came up with the musty ledger in which he'd recently entered this young stranger. He thumbed back through its greasy pages. Then his thumb was running down a column. He looked up.

"Clark," he said. "Clark Werts."

The young man looked satisfied. "Thanks," he said. He turned away again, picking up his luggage.

"Have to take the stairs," the clerk shouted after him. "The elevator ain't worked in ten years."

The young man crossed the small, decrepit lobby and turned to the staircase. He didn't look back . . .

IN THE gray bare surroundings of his room, the young man who had registered as Richard Werts placed his expensive luggage in a corner and sat down on the edge of an ancient duralloy bed. He removed his tunic coat and carefully took from it a small, worn envelope.

He opened the envelope and removed a letter.

For what was probably the sixtieth time he had examined the message, he began to read it again. It was short, terse, and penned in a strongly masculine hand.

"Dear Ricky:

This is it, kid. This is the fare-the-well. Don't try to follow me. by now you'll probably know I was the guilty devil. Understand me, when you find I've taken the easy

way out. Stick to your guns, 'Commander,' and don't let this throw you.

Best,

Clark."

The young man folded the letter, eyes blurring, and put it back in the envelope. Then he placed the envelope carefully back in his rich blue tunic coat. He rose to his feet then, and began pacing back and forth beside the bed.

"Clark didn't do it," he said. "I know he didn't do it." He was muttering the words, half aloud, as if the sound of his own voice should reassure him.

"My brother would never have done it," he muttered again. "He was decent, too damned decent. Clark wasn't the sort. Even if he'd been desperate —the way they tried to tell me he was —he'd never had been that sort. Commander," he said more softly, "I'll never forget that by-word of ours."

The young man was thinking, and the years were falling away. Five, ten of them. He was eleven years old. Young Ricky Stevens, hanging around the Spaceport, waiting for his brother, Clark, to come in from school. Six years older than he, Clark had been all of seventeen then. That seemed like a ripe old age to the kid who stood waiting for his older brother. Young Ricky had always looked on Clark as sort of a god. And when Clark, big-shouldered, red-headed, and grinning in that flashing way of his, stepped out of the ship at Spaceport, young Ricky Stevens almost broke his neck dashing across the space landing platform to his side.

"Hello, Commander," Clark had grinned. "Glad you're here to meet me!"

That had been a special sort of title with them. When they'd been even younger, and played around the vast family estate—the war games that kids always played—Ricky had been Clark's army. An army of one kid, commanded by his older brother. It was Clark who made his younger brother call him Commander at first, and young Ricky had been happy to do so. Neither of them had thought the family name, Stevens, was military enough in its ring. So Clark had devised another—Werts.

Ricky had called his older brother Commander Werts from then on. And when Clark had grown out of the war game stage, Ricky had still affectionately called him Commander. It had been one of the proudest days in young Ricky's life when Clark passed on the coveted title to him.

CLARK had been going to school, leaving for four years, and Ricky, a lump in his throat, had watched his idol packing. The two of them, with that understanding sensed only by brothers, had felt the significance of the parting.

"I'll be back, kid," Clark had said a little huskily, patting young Ricky on the arm. "And in the meantime it'll be up to you to keep things running here."

Ricky had gulped and nodded, his eyes filmed by tears which he was much too proud to shed.

"Tell you what, kid," Clark had said suddenly. "The army is yours. I pass my command over to you. From now on you're Commander Werts."

Ricky's eyes shone through the film. "Gee, Clark," he'd gasped. "Gee!" The accolade left him breathless.

And from that time on, Clark had called his brother by the title he'd passed on. He'd used it less, as the years marched on, but whenever there was cause for unspoken praise, Clark called him Commander Werts. Ricky

always understood.

Clark had gone on to college, then, and Ricky entered prep school a year or so later. When Clark had finished college, and came back to the New York estate of the family, Ricky was in his second year at another university. They'd kept in touch constantly, and there were vacations that gave Ricky a chance to see his brother for a few days.

Clark had set up an Interspacial Export firm of his own -in characteristic fashion disdaining the family business and wanting to make his own way in the world—and he offered Ricky a place in it when the younger brother graduated from college. But as much as Ricky would have wanted to be with his brother, he, too, showed characteristic family independence and entered law on his own.

"I know how you feel about it, Commander," Clark had grinned. "As much as I'd like to have you in my outfit, I must admit I'd have been a little disappointed if you'd leaned on me to get a start."

Ricky had been glad of his decision, then, even if it meant he'd see much less of Clark now that they were both out on their own. Clark's export business took him on constant space tours, and Ricky was more or less confined to New York where he had his law practice.

Clark's business had prospered. At least that was the way it had seemed. And then there'd been that disastrous affair.

There was a murder. Clark's greatest competitor was brutally slain. Everything pointed to Clark—who couldn't be found.

It was shown in court that the murdered man had been too tough a competitor for Clark's export firm. It was also shown that Clark's firm was on the brink of bankruptcy. There was a confusing inter-contract deal between Clark's firm and that of the murdered competitor. It showed a perfect motive for the ghastly crime. Clark's mysterious disappearance was taken as conclusive proof of his guilt.

And then the letter from Clark had arrived at Ricky's law office. The same letter which he had just reread for the sixtieth time. It had been a genuine letter, Ricky was certain of that. But as for the so-called "confession" contained in it, Ricky hadn't been able to believe as much.

But the authorities believed it. Ricky hadn't wanted to take the letter to them, but a friend of Clark's—a chap named Paul Ebbing, who'd been in the export game with him—had seen the note and convinced Ricky that they should turn it over to the interplanetary police.

They found Clark not so long after that. Found, at least, the charred body of a person they identified as Clark. A charred body in the wreck of Clark's private sports space ship. Self destruction, they said in their reports. Suicide, proving beyond a doubt that Clark had been guilty.

CLARK'S body had been identified by the clothes, or what was left of them, and general markings. But Ricky hadn't found his class ring. And this, plus several other suspicious details of the horrible incident, had made him certain that the charred corpse found in the wreckage of his brother's space ship was not Clark.

Ricky let the identification stand, with the realization that he could reopen the case later when he proved his conclusions correct. He had then set out to find Clark.

And now he had found him.

Here in the most forlorn and deso-

late outer reaches of space, at the very border of the interplanetary badlands, Ricky had picked up the first substantial clue leading to confirmation of his belief that Clark was not dead.

For Clark had registered in this same hotel. And Clark had kept his true given name and used—for obviously sentimental reasons—a last name that had been a byword with them when they were kids.

The same name that Ricky had chosen to use in registering—Werts.

Ricky stopped his pacing. He fished into the pocket of his discarded tunic coat for a venusian cigarette. His hands trembled slightly as he lit it.

He exhaled a cloud of smoke.

Tomorrow he would draw even closer to Clark. Tomorrow he would register with the Outer Space Patrol Legions.* Clark was already in their ranks, Ricky was certain. People didn't come here to Barkay for the scenic advantages. There were none of those on this god forsaken little asteroid. People came here with one purpose—the same purpose that had drawn Clark here, and now had brought Ricky. They came to bury their past in the dangerous future of the Outer Space Patrol Legions, whose central headquarters were, appropriately, located on this desolate little sphere called Barkay. . . .

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* *Outer Space Patrol Legions* were formed by the conference of Universe Peace in 2032 A.D. to keep and maintain the freedom of the void for Universe commerce. Attending the conference were heads of the departments of state from Mars, Earth, Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, Saturn, Neptune, and Pluto. At that time the suspicious, crafty Malyas from the planets of Messier 31 refused to participate in the conference. Since they were considered outlaw brigands their coöperation was never expected or trusted. In reality the conference was instigated by the Interplanetary Federation for the express purpose of bringing law and order to the space frontier—a frontier that had often been violated by the Malyas from their bases on their planet in Messier 31.—Ed.

CHAPTER II

A Man in the Making

THE Recruiting Officer of the Outer Space Patrol Legion faced Ricky the following morning. He sat behind a small, clean, unpretentious desk in a white, bare, severe office. He wore the deep blue tunic of the Legion. On his chest were miniatures of many campaign medals, and on his left arm were six gold seniority stripes. He was a short man, dark haired and wide shouldered, and a rugged, granite like expression chisled on his rocky features.

His eyes fixed Ricky's unsmilingly.

"We never accept a man who isn't absolutely aware of what he's getting in for," the Recruiting Officer declared. His voice was deep and somewhat harsh.

"I know that," Ricky answered.

The officer's eyes traveled over Ricky's expensive attire.

"There is no story book glory connected with the men of our patrols. Not of the sort that legend leads people to believe, at any rate. The pay amounts almost to nothing. Promotion can only be attained by the hard way. It's long in coming, if you live to deserve it."

"I understand that also," Ricky said.

"Most of the men who enter this office," the officer went on, ignoring Ricky's last remark, "are running away from something or someone in their past. We don't delude ourselves that they're coming to us because of any appeal service in our ranks might have. We are not interested in what they are escaping from, nor what they might have been before they joined us. Most of them are misfits, for any of a hundred reasons, from society. We don't care about that, either. If they are

cowards, we find that out shortly enough and before their cowardice can cost us the lives of any others in our ranks."

Ricky looked at the hard, gnarled hands of the officer as he drummed his fingers on the desk while he spoke.

"Your enlistment in our ranks is for seven years," the officer went on. "Quite frankly, four out of every ten men who join our ranks never live to be mustered out of service at the end of that time. I'd like you to consider this very carefully. Take a day to do it, if you like. It's obvious from the words you use, from the clothes you wear, from your very manner of standing here before my desk, that the life you've left behind you is a lot softer than the life you wish to enter. Think that part over very carefully. If you're running away from something back in that life—and I repeat we don't care if you are—I just want you to realize you're running away straight into the arms of a buzz saw when you come to us. Do I make myself clear?"

Ricky nodded slowly. "I understand perfectly. I shan't need any additional time to consider this. I've thought it out carefully long ago."

THE officer considered Ricky's expression for a moment. Then he shrugged, smiled, and reached for a sheaf of papers beside his elbow. He placed them before Ricky.

"The enlistment is seven years. The penalty for desertion is, at all times, death. Sign these," he instructed.

Ricky leafed casually through the papers, seeming to examine them carefully yet swiftly. Then he bent over them and affixed his signature to the bottom of each paper. When he straightened up he seemed to have relaxed.

The officer pressed a microtube button on his desk and spoke into a tiny box. "A recruit, Richard Werts. My office. Supplies."

He flicked off the button and turned back to Ricky.

"My luggage," Ricky began, indicating the expensive baggage behind him. "Will I be permitted to—"

The officer anticipated his question, shook his head. "It will be returned to you seven years from now — when you're mustered out. Don't worry about it."

Ricky smiled for the first time. "I wasn't worrying. I was just wondering."

At the corner of the little office a door opened. The officer stood up behind his desk, clearing his throat. He held out a gnarled right hand.

"Goodbye, Legionaire Richard Werts," he said, "and good luck!"

Ricky took his hand, felt the hard, strong, reassuring grasp and was grateful for it. He grinned once, and the officer returned the grin. Then he turned on his heel, after executing a somewhat makeshift salute. An orderly stood waiting for him, his expression noncommittal.

"Follow me, Legionaire," he said. . . .

IF RICKY had felt that he would soon be beside his brother Clark, and that the arrival of that long awaited moment would be but a matter of days, he was doomed to disappointment. Exactly one month after he had left the small recruiting office in Barkay, he was still on that god forsaken little asteroid, undergoing the rigid training service at the military barracks there.

It was hard going. The thick shouldered recruiting officer hadn't been guilty of understatement when he'd warned Ricky of that. There was drill, endless and fatiguing. There was instruction in military maneuver that

seemed endlessly wearisome.

The barracks were cold and prison like in their atmosphere. The other recruits with whom Ricky trained, some fifty of them, were for the most part cynical riff-raff from the interplanetary gutters. But they were tough, and apparently fearless. Only a few of them were stupid. And in the attitudes of all of them there was complete and almost happy acceptance of their new lives. They seemed, all of them, like men glad to have left the rest of the world behind them, happy in the awareness that their past was buried completely for the next seven years.

The days were long, and even the constant attention to drill and detail, drill and detail, didn't lessen their aching endlessness to Ricky. But with the passing of each of these days, Ricky was confident in the knowledge that he was getting harder, swifter, keener—tapering down into the vicious human fighting machine that symbolized the Legionaire of the Outer Space Patrol.

At the end of a month there was strength and steel and sinew in his very bearing. His muscles were flat and hard, his eyes alive and restless. He was beginning to wear the swashbuckling blue tunic of the Legionaire as if it were a part of him, and he eagerly awaited the day that would send him off to his first patrol station.

And finally there was that day when the Instructing Officer stood before the fifty monthlings on the parade ground and read the order that tingled every last man of them to his heels.

"Forty out of fifty of you," the Instructing Officer had announced, "have been judged as ready for preliminary patrol training. The rest of you will remain here at the barracks for two more weeks extensive training in fundamentals. Those forty of you who have been judged fit for further work will be sent to the Outer Space Patrol Legion Base at Tromar.* The other ten, if they don't show considerable improvement within the next two weeks, will receive unimportant detail assignments at the home bases."

Standing there at attention, Ricky felt the tingling surge of excitement and suspense that comes only to a soldier at such moments. The Instructing Officer began to read the names of the favored forty—

"Yjaka, Carroll, Masters, Revwa, Nougak, *Werts*, Sommers" and his voice went on naming the other thirty-three, while Ricky stood there elatedly, hearing only his own name ringing in his ears. He'd made it. He was closer, now, to Clark!

When, finally, the Instructing Officer had dismissed the monthlings, Ricky was joined by a tall, hard, sleek earthman named Carroll. He had bunked in the same dormitory as Ricky, and although they had spent occasional leisure moments together, Ricky had always felt a subconscious distrust of the chap.

"Congratulations, Werts," Carroll said, in his soft, too cultured voice. "I see we'll both be heading toward inevitable glory now, eh?" There was, as always, the slightest amused contempt in his voice. Barrack rumor had it that Carroll was a jewel thief hiding from the interplanetary police. Ricky neither believed nor doubted this, for he had already taken the Legion attitude of accepting a man on present value rather than past renown or notoriety.

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* *Tromar* is a frontier space port comparable to the outpost of Cheyenne in the year 1840. Tromar, in the year 2038 A.D., was subjected to constant raids and life there is as perilous as it was for those brave Americans and Filipinos who fought with MacArthur of the Philippines in the year of the Great War, 1942.—Ed.

BUT there was something in Carroll's attitude that Ricky instinctively resented; a camaraderie that intimated common bonds, not only of having lived well and fully in their respective past lives, but equally uncleanly.

Carroll didn't seem to notice the fact that Ricky didn't answer him, however, for he continued to stride along beside him as they made their way across the parade ground to the canteen.

"There's a rumor around that we're going to be trained damned fast," Carroll went on. "Seems there's been more than an average ratio of trouble running along the outer space borders. The grapevine has it that a small asteroid garrison of the Outer Space Patrol Legion was completely wiped out a few days back. There was nothing but their charred corpses left lying around when the checking Patrol arrived on the scene."

Ricky felt a sudden chill. Perhaps Clark had been one of that annihilated garrison!

He forced himself to reply casually. "Is that so? What post?"

Carroll shook his head. "Don't know. One of the bad spots. They think the *Malyas* did it, however. Little doubt of that angle."

Ricky shuddered mentally. The *Malyas* were a vicious, weird tribe of Outer Space brigands. Creatures from another universe, their periodic raids and constant guerilla warfare along the interplanetary borderlands, had been the greatest problem faced since the formation of the Interplanetary Federation. Cruel, cunning, inhuman, the threat of these creatures was a constant danger to the civilized sections of space.

"Was the garrison comprised of new men or veterans?" Ricky asked.

Carroll shrugged. "Veterans, or so I understand."

Ricky sighed in relief. Clark was probably not among them. Carroll noted this sudden change in expression, and his brown eyes narrowed. They entered the canteen, and Carroll bought a bottle of Venusian wine.

"Share it, won't you, old boy?" Carroll invited, indicating a small table.

Ricky shrugged ungraciously. "Very well."

They were seated, and Carroll filled the glasses, when he said casually, "You're a funny duck, Werts. Can't seem to dope you out. You aren't like the rest." His tone indicated that Ricky was like himself, and that the comparison was meant as a compliment.

Ricky shrugged, sipping the cheap, bitter wine. He fished into his tunic pocket and found a cigarette. They were a harsh Junovian brand, the best he could afford on his meager pay allowances.

Carroll's tone was cloying, confidential. "Myself, for an example," he said, dropping his voice, "I'm not like the rest of our comrades, either. We're both used to better things. Neither of us were thugs. I, well, I don't mind admitting, had a rather slick thing before I came here." He laughed apologetically. "I was able to do quite nicely for myself with it, until it suddenly became a matter of immediate urgency that I remove my handsome hide to a quick hideout. This seemed to be my best move."

Ricky took a deep draught on his cigarette and raised his eyebrows noncommittally. He said nothing.

Carroll pushed his uniform cap back on his slick blonde hair and refilled his glass. He was driving at something, that much was obvious. And it was also certain that he didn't quite know how to go after what he sought. Ricky wasn't being helpful. Suddenly Carroll

leaned forward and his tone became sickeningly friendly.

"What was your racket?" he asked.

Ricky's gray eyes clouded with frost.

Carroll had the grace to turn crimson. "I mean," he said swiftly, "I wasn't trying to pry into your background, old boy."

"What were you doing, then?" Ricky asked frigidly.

"I, ah, I was just comparing notes, so to speak. I didn't think you'd be touchy. We could save ourselves a lot of grief in this present set-up if we got together. One for all, all for one, that sort of thing, you know." Carroll said in an explanatory torrent.

"I see," Ricky said noncommittally. "And what's your background, Carroll?"

CARROLL became suddenly more at ease. He grinned and bent forward once more. "Ice," he said. "Valuable jewelry. Flick!" He waved one long fingered, gracefully tapered hand to show the theft of an object from thin air. He sat back and grinned.

"Society b a c k g r o u n d, pinch the pearls stuff, eh?" asked Ricky.

Carroll nodded. "Right. It was a cinch. Society chap myself, you know. Made it easy. Had lots of friends. No one suspected."

"Then why are you here?" Ricky asked in the same toneless voice.

Carroll frowned, then laughed. "I see what you mean. If no one was wise, why am I here. Good question. They got wise, eventually, under rather messy circumstances. There was a person murdered. Ghastly thing, ruined my trade. I had to scoot."

"So you joined the Outer Space Patrol Legion until things died down and you could come back in seven years or so, eh?" Ricky said.

Carroll smirked. "Seven years is a long time. Too long for one of my, ah, impatient traits."

"The penalty for desertion is death," Ricky reminded him flatly.

"So is the penalty for murder," Carroll smiled.

"Then you have an angle," Ricky said. "I see."

Carroll smiled smugly. "You might say I have many angles, old man. All of them right angles." He snickered at his play on words.

"And I take it that these angles need two men to properly develop them, eh?" Ricky asked.

Carroll nodded. "That's it exactly," he admitted. "I knew from the minute I set eyes on you that you were the man to take in on my plans. You have brains, old boy, and background."

Ricky nodded sarcastically. "How flattering of you," he murmured.

The look Carroll gave him was suddenly sharp. "I'm not trying to be flattering," he said, the purr leaving his voice and his eyes growing hard. "I'm trying to let you in on some angles—smart angles—that can make this forced concealment in these uniforms," he indicated his plain blue tunic distastefully, "a little bit more pleasant and a little less permanent. What do you say?"

Ricky met his cold stare evenly. He held out his empty glass, and Carroll filled it.

"I say," Ricky declared with measured distaste, "that your wine is much better than your ideas. And I can't say that I enjoyed the wine too much!"

CHAPTER III

Carroll's Second Bid

THE Outer Patrol Space Legion Base at Tromar was much larger

than the preliminary training quarters at the enlistment base on Barkay. And it was two days later that Ricky, with the forty men from the primary training garrison, arrived at the new location.

The first sight that met his eyes when he entered the huge walled garrison was the broad, glistening sheen of silver metal that served as the space landing platform for the fortress.

As Ricky followed the others from Barkay out the door of the space transport ship and onto the ever extending platform of the landing runway, his jaw fell open in amazement at the vast array of variously designed orange and blue space fighting craft.

Their leader, one of the Officers from the base at Barkay, saw the open mouthed astonishment on the faces of the men he led, and smilingly explained, "These are the space birds of war. When you learn to fly 'em and fight 'em, you'll be ready for patrol duty."

And on that note, the month's training at Tromar began. A month that made the grueling sessions of training on Barkay seem like child's play by comparison. But Ricky was hardened now, by his first month in the Legion, and it was that hardness that enabled him to survive the rigors of the month that followed.

They learned to handle the space fighters during the morning sessions. They learned to put them through maneuvers in the afternoon grinds. They learned to use the deadly crafts in mimic combat in practice night patrols.

And there was more than that. Navigation, ray gunnery, fleet flying, the intricacies of mass out-in-space boarding party raiding, and countless other drills.

This month moved more swiftly for Ricky, however, for he had at last caught up on a link or two in Clark's recent movements. There was a little old Junovian who worked in the garrison canteen, for example, who remembered Clark as having been at the Tromar base four months before.

With this information on hand, Ricky went cautiously about gathering additional information concerning his brother's whereabouts from others at the garrison—men stationed permanently there—who were able to recall Clark.

Officially, however, Ricky was able to gain no information. A solid wall of secrecy surrounded the movements of Outer Space Patrol Legions and the men in them. This was understandable, of course, for that very cloak of mystery aided in concealing troop and military maneuvers from possible enemy spies.

As the end of the final month's preparatory training drew to a close, but twenty-five men remained of the original forty recruits who had come from the base at Barkay.

Ten of the fifteen had been too slow in night maneuvers. They had died for their navigational inaccuracies, paid for minor miscalculations with their lives. Crack-ups in outer space, especially at the utterly phenomenal speeds with which the space war ships hurtled through the void, were inevitably fatal.

Two of the fifteen had killed one another in a bloody brawl during a drunken argument. The other three had been shot for attempted desertion. Their court martials had been but formalities.

And through it all Ricky had remained unscathed. Sheer nerve, indomitable hardness of muscle, had saved his life twice. The Ricky of four months before would not have lived, but this was a different person who strode to the Garrison Commander's Office, three days before the expiration of the month at Tromar, to receive his orders.

AN orderly in the outer office gave Ricky his sealed orders. Gave him his orders in exactly the same manner as he did the other twenty-four men who'd finished their preliminary training. A crisp salute, a folded white envelope, a brief smile, and Ricky walked back past the line formed along the corridor outside the offices.

"We get same base. Don't you hope? Don't you like?" asked Yenka, the burly Martian recruit who'd joined in the same batch with Ricky, back at Barkay. Ricky grinned and nodded. He liked the purple thatched Yenka. The fellow had been a strong arm robber, according to the camp grapevine. But his very frankness about his background, and lack of hypocrisy, made him much more tolerable to Ricky than, say, Carroll.

Back in his quarters, Ricky opened his envelope. The white, teletyped sheet, was terse, officially cold.

OUTER SPACE PATROL
LEGIONNAIRE RICHARD WERTS:
PRIMARY—BARKAY
ADDITIONAL PRIMARY—TROMAR
ULTIMATE STATION TO WHICH YOU ARE TO PROCEED IMMEDIATELY, HAS BEEN DESIGNATED AS CEPANI. ASSIGNMENT TO SPACE PATROL SERVICE AT THAT POST HAS BEEN ARRANGED.
COMMANDER USLANKY.

Ricky felt his hands shaking as he held the white sheet tightly in his fingers. His heart hammered with excited expectancy. This was what he had been waiting for. Active assignment. The chance to find Clark!

He stuffed the envelope into the pocket of his blue uniform tunic and lighted a cigarette. Immediate assignment. That would mean this very night, no doubt.

Ricky sat down on the edge of his hard cot and wondered how far Cepani was from Tromar, how far it was from Barkay.

Footsteps sounded on the duralloy floor. Ricky looked up and saw Carroll. The tall, sleek, lithely muscled blonde jewel thief had avoided Ricky for the most part, since their arrival at Tromar, and Ricky was certain that he'd been nourishing hatred toward him ever since their last afternoon in Barkay.

His expression now, as he approached Ricky, surprisingly contained no malice. The big, wide shouldered blonde was even smiling ingratiatingly.

"Well, we're together again, I understand," Carroll said, by way of greeting.

"I don't know what you understand," Ricky said, "or where you get your information. I just opened my assignment envelope a few moments ago."

Carroll smiled. "I told you once a person could play things the right way in this outfit. You get to have the right angles and you find out things. I knew we'd both be assigned to Cepani yesterday. If you'd asked me I could have told you as much."

"Look," Ricky said with cold politeness, "will you kindly get the hell out of here?"

Carroll smirked. "As you like it, Werts. You're being a damned fool, however. I can also tell you, right now, that Cepani is the outpost garrison that was wiped out by *Malyas* a little while back. Remember that bit of grapevine information I got? Cepani, my friend, is going to be a tough place to stay alive in. It's a nasty post. A man'll need a lot of angles to keep his hide there. Think that over, old man, and any time you're willing to get wise, let me know."

Carroll turned away, then, and strode jauntily down the row of barrack cots and out the door. Ricky watched him leave, frowning meditatively. There

was something screwy about Carroll, something aside from the naturally repulsive oiliness of the man, that was distastefully ominous, menacing.

"How," Ricky wondered aloud, "does he know so damned much official information in advance? And where does he have this rumor source of his?"

RICKY shook his head in bewilderment. It was too hard to understand. Just as it was hard to understand why Carroll would have returned with his "angles and ideas" today, after having been so coldly and emphatically rebuffed by Ricky on the first occasion.

Ricky shook his head again. It was strange, too damned strange. He shrugged. However, there was no time to think of that now. There was gear to check, and supplies. He felt almost positive that his departure for the active duty post was scheduled officially for tonight.

The burly, purple haired Martian, Yenka, came bursting into the barrack quarters just as Ricky set about cleaning his equipment. His face was beaming, his yellow teeth savage in a grin of glee.

"We get same base!" he chortled. "We get same base! Good, is not? Fine, isn't?"

Ricky grinned, then the grin left his face and his eyes narrowed. Yenka, too, was aware that he was assigned to the same base as Ricky. What in the hell was this?

"Look," said Ricky quietly, "how do you know we're assigned together?"

Yenka slapped Ricky thumpingly on the back with his huge paw. "Carroll is outside when I am come in. Carroll is tell me, after I am tell Carroll what base I am being sending to. Is fine, no?"

The frown left Ricky's features. That explained Yenka's knowledge. He rubbed a faint stubble of beard on his chin reflectively a moment, then addressed Yenka abruptly.

"When did Carroll join the outfit?"

Yenka looked bewildered. "Carroll, when he come to Barkay?"

Ricky nodded. "It was about the same time you showed up in our ranks, wasn't it?"

Yenka thought a moment. "Is so," he decided emphatically. "He is join Legion at same day I am. We almost join same time."

"That's what I thought," Ricky muttered reflectively.

"Why is good to know?" Yenka demanded puzzledly.

Ricky grinned disarmingly. "No reason, Yenk. Just wondering, that's all."

"That Carroll a bad one," Yenka warned dourly. "Don't make term with that Carroll, Reeky."

Ricky nodded. "Never in a million light years, Yenk. Don't worry about that."

Yenka grinned at this reassurance. "Is good. Worry Yenka to see Carroll-snake slink around you, Reeky. You good fella. No place with Carroll."

Ricky patted the Martian Legionaire's burly shoulder somewhat affectionately. "Don't worry, Yenk. You'd better start getting your gear in shape, else you'll get caught with a lot of last minute preparations. I've a hunch we'll be saying goodbye to Tromar sometime tonight."

Yenka raised bushy purple eyebrows. "This night, you think, eh, Reeky?"

RICKY nodded. Yenka made a whistling noise to indicate both surprise and delight, and shuffled down the line of barrack cots to the far end of the room where his own quarters were located.

Ricky set about the task of polishing

his leather holsters, equipment sacks, beltings, and space boots and gauntlets. As he worked he went back over Carroll's actions from the first day he'd seen the jewel thief at Barkay. Meditatively, as he worked, he endeavored to find some chink in the armor of that Legionaire's actions that would explain some of the mysterious knowledge he seemed to have access to.

By the time he'd set about polishing the glass turret on his space helmet, Ricky had covered and recovered the ground he'd mapped on Carroll's actions. There were plenty of suspicious movements, but not one of them indicated anything.

Ricky gave it up, and sighingly forgot the matter.

As Ricky had expected, the call to leave for active duty came that night. The eerie sound of the siren bugle shrilled forth the signal to the twenty men concerned, and the barracks quarter in which the men had been lying in open-eyed anticipation, suddenly came to life . . .

CHAPTER IV

The Malyas Attack

RICKY was the first man out on the parade ground. Yenka followed not so far behind them. Trotting, dragging their compact full fighting equipment with them, they trotted across the parade ground to the vast, wide stretch of the space landing platform shimmering in the pale half light of the silvered darkness.

There was a sergeant waiting for them, standing just off from a large, fifty-rocketed space transport ship. The sergeant had a white sheet of paper in his hand. The muffled warming-up vibrations of the rockets in the large troop spaceship were throbbingly exciting to Ricky, who felt his heart trying to keep tempo.

The others were arriving now, taking their places at attention beside Ricky and Yenka. Carroll was among the last of the stragglers to arrive, and Ricky wondered, fleetingly, if the lithe blonde giant hadn't known of this embarkation. It seemed unlikely that he wouldn't have known in advance, especially in view of the fact that he seemed to have private sources of information constantly on tap.

Then Ricky shoved the problem from his mind. The sergeant was calling the role, and the Legionaires were acounting themselves as on hand and ready.

The sergeant, Marlow, a red necked, bull voiced man, then donned his own glass turreted space helmet, drew on his space gauntlets, slid into the zippered, electrically heated space suit he'd had ready, and the others followed suit.

Sergeant Marlow held up three fingers of his right gauntlet. That indicated that their receptor gauges should be set at third volume intake, to permit complete and unhampered communication with one another and their superior officer during the journey through space.

The throbbing of the rockets on the big troop transport had grown in volume to an almost deafening staccato.

The side hatchways on the ship were rolled back, a gangplank let down. Turning in formation drill, the Legionaires picked up their gear, shifted their electra-rifles to their left shoulders in unison, and marched up into the side of the ship.

Ricky was the first inside the troop carrier, and he made his way to the front of the big spaceship, taking his place on the right of the aisle in a small, comfortable seat that was fashioned so as to provide the utmost space for fight-

ing equipment while at the same time affording bodily comfort as well as could be expected.

Yenka took the seat across the aisle from Ricky. Behind them, in straight two-across formation, the others took their places. Then Ricky heard the doors at the side of the ship rolling back into place. A moment later Sergeant Marlow marched down the aisle, inspecting the proper placement of equipment on the part of his charges.

Up ahead of him, Ricky knew, behind the heavy duralloy doors that blocked their compartments off from the troops they carried, were the pilots of the space craft.

Sergeant Marlow's red face beneath the glass turret of his space helmet was grim and unsmiling. Around the training grounds of Tromar he had been a bluff, jovial, almost raucously humorous chap. His attitude now was in complete contrast.

Marlow looked like what he was. A tough Sergeant in a tough outfit in a tough situation which he was determined to carry through with professional hardness.

And then Marlow was moving to the rear of the spaceship troop transport, and from the sudden, almost imperceptible lessening in the rocket vibrations of the craft, Ricky was certain that the pilots were easing rocket throttles toward the first open blasts that would send them screaming spaceward.

He was hurled back against his seat in the next instant, and from the porthole on his right, Ricky caught only the flickering swirl of the night's starstream shooting past them.

They were out in space moments later. Out in space and headed for Cepani.

THE minutes that followed stretched themselves into interminable hours, and finally, on instructions from Sergeant Marlow, the contingent of space Legionaires dug into haversacks for their concentrated rations. After this there was a brief exercise period, a period in which the men moved up and down the confinements of the spaceship in squads of four for ten minutes at a time.

Later Ricky slept, and when he woke again he was startled to realize that a day had passed and that they were into another night and another meal on concentrated pill rations. There was more exercise after this, and more sluggishly plodding hours of silence as the sleek craft roared through the space lanes.

Ricky must have dozed off a little later, for suddenly he was blinking his eyes and looking startledly about as the voice of Sergeant Marlow rang through the receptor of his space helmet.

"Discard all but fighting gear!" the voice thundered. "Prepare to repulse attack. *Malyas* are closing in on the transport!"

Ricky was on his feet then, pushing haversack equipment to the side of the seat, reaching for his electra-rifle. His heart began to pound furiously in excitement. On every side of him other Legionaires were discarding their unnecessary equipment and lining themselves in formation along the aisle of the transport.

Ricky took a quick glance out the transport porthole. All he saw was the blackness of space around him. Then he was out in the center aisle of the ship, lining up with his comrades. Yenka was directly on his right, the pug-faced Martian's features grinning delightedly behind the turret of his space helmet.

Sergeant Marlow moved swiftly up the line to the front of the ship. He

stepped through the heavy bulkhead that led to the pilot's compartments. A moment later he reappeared.

Ricky noticed that he had strapped two atomic pistols to his sides.

"All right," Marlow barked. "There's exactly three *Malya* ships heading toward us. They haven't opened fire yet. They haven't the range. I've a hunch they'll try to board us. We'll need two gun crews to man the atomic cannon on our top turret." His eyes swept along the line of Legionaires.

"Carroll," Marlow snapped, and from the far end of the line the tall blonde stepped forward.

"Yenka," Marlow barked in the next breath. Almost chortling with glee, the Martian stepped forward.

Marlow hesitated an instant. "Werts!" he snapped. Ricky stepped forward.

"You three will man the fore gun turret," he said. "Leave your electra-rifles in the cabin, take your atomic pistols along."

Then Ricky was dumping his rifle to the top of his equipment, making fast the notches in his holster belt as he strapped an atomic pistol to his waist. Even though he'd removed his space gauntlets, his fingers all felt like thumbs. His mouth was dry.

"All right," Marlow ordered. Then he barked three more names, instructed those Legionaires to man the rear gun turrets, and declared he would arrange the porthole defense with electra-rifles in another moment.

Ricky, Yenka, and Carroll passed Marlow on the way to the forward hatch that led to the upper gun turret.

"Don't forget what we've burned into your thick skulls," he snapped. "Good luck."

CARROLL was first up the hatchway ladder, Ricky followed behind him, and then Yenka. Then they were on the smooth "bubble" of glassicade atop the space transport, and Yenka was tugging the hatch cover back in place.

Ricky saw that Carroll had already dashed to the firing position behind a round snouted atomic cannon, and he paused a minute, to look up through the sheen of glassicade around them.

And then he saw the *Malyas*.

There were, as Marlow had said, three of their ships following the troop transport through space at a distance of several miles. They were incredibly slim, sleek ships, and Ricky recalled that they were reputed to have tremendous powers of speed, but very little maneuverability.

He settled himself behind the second atomic cannon.

Yenka had left the hatch, now, and took the third post.

Ricky dragged on his space gauntlets and siezed the trigger bars of the atomic cannon. He swung the gun around in a swift circular motion, making certain that it wasn't jammed. Carroll and Yenka were making the same tests on their guns.

Carroll caught Ricky's eye and grinned, waving his gauntleted hand in a nonchalant gesture. As much as he despised the man, Ricky had to admire his coolness and eclat under danger.

There were covers, partitions, over each of the three atomic gun positions. Ricky pressed the button which rolled back the glassicade cover around and above his cannon. It worked smoothly. Ricky turned the current higher on his electrically heated space suit, as the cold swept in through the sudden vent, and signalled Carroll and Yenka to do the same. He saw their hands turning the switches on their chest panels and nodded in satisfaction.

Ricky pointed to his opened cover

partition, indicating that he thought it wise that the others swing theirs free for action now rather than later.

The *Malya* ships were creeping up closer now, and Ricky was certain that the pilots of the transport, knowing they couldn't outrace the enemy, were slowing somewhat to permit a better defense of their ship.

Ricky's gun faced the tail of the ship, Yenka's gun the nose, and Carroll's the center. And then the slim, sleek craft of the *Malyas* were driving upward for altitude, getting ready for dive attacks.

Ricky's gauntleted finger released the stop catch on the side of his trigger bars. His head was craned back, and he peered upward at the *Malya* ships climbing high behind the tail of the transport.

Any instant now, and they would start diving—

They dove!

Ricky's fingers pulled tight on the trigger bars and his atomic cannon belched orange flame upward into space. He fired too soon with his first blasts, missing the first diving *Malya* ship. The *Malya* craft took advantage of this, and red fire coughed from its nose as it hurled death and destruction toward the transport.

Ricky's cannon work, although it hadn't accounted for a *Malya* ship, had diverted its fire, and the red spurts of flame went wide of the transport as the first diving ship continued onward under the quarry.

Ricky held his fire on the second ship until it was less than a few hundred yards away. He didn't miss this time, and the orange blasts that coughed from his cannon caught the Malya craft squarely on the nose, setting it immediately aflame!

With fierce satisfaction, Ricky watched the *Malya* raider roll over, down, then away. By now it was nothing more than a blazing ball of flame dropping wildly through space. First blood.

The third Malya ship cut its dive short, rather than risk the same fate, and zoomed up quickly out of range, climbing for safety. Ricky relaxed and wished to God that he could get inside his space helmet to wipe the streaming perspiration from his face. He turned and grinned at Yenka who was waving clasped hands above his head. Carroll was smiling also, and nodding his compliments.

Ricky waited there while moments ticked sluggishly onward. But the *Malya* spacecraft which had climbed upward to safety didn't appear again. Neither did the first ship that had dived on them. Ricky's spine began to ache.

Finally, when it seemed as if an hour must have passed, Ricky saw the hatch cover to the cabin below slide back and Marlow's turreted head thrust through.

He signalled them to leave their posts and his head disappeared back into the cabin. Ricky pressed the button that rolled the glassicade partition back over his gun position. The others did likewise. He set the stop catch on the trigger bars of his atomic cannon and climbed wearily to his feet.

The attack was over. The *Malyas* had been beaten off.

Ricky was last down the hatch ladder into the cabin. Yenka was jabbering excitedly to Marlow and pointing at Ricky. Marlow met Ricky's eyes.

"Nice work," his voice came to Ricky. "They got Fleck, one of our men in the underside turret." His face was tired.

Ricky felt suddenly utterly weary. The triumph drained from him leaving only aching fatigue. Fleck had been a good man. A Legionaire hates to see a good man go from his outfit. Ricky realized that had he been in the

under turret rather than Fleck, it might be Fleck who had the honor, and Ricky who was dead. That was the Outer Space Legion. That was war in space . . .

CHAPTER V

Death Strikes the Patrol

CEPANI was as desolate an asteroid garrison as Ricky had ever laid eyes on. And when the large transport ship slid onto the space landing platform at Cepani hours later, Ricky looked out the porthole with a mixture of wonder and disgust on his features.

The fortress on Cepani was apparently all that the asteroid contained. It was a military outpost, nothing more, nothing less.

Yenka, standing at Ricky's shoulder, expressed the emotions of all the newly arriving men.

"It bad," he declared sincerely. "A place for a Legionaire to go crazy."

Sergeant Marlow, moving up and down the aisle to make certain that his charges would be ready to disembark with a flourish, looked none too happy about his new assignment. Neither did the small knot of Legionaires who waited curiously out on the landing platform.

But Ricky's excitement returned when he saw those men waiting for them, for this was the garrison at which Clark might be stationed. This might be the end of his search!

Marlow lined them up before they were ready to step out down the gangplank to their new quarters.

"Step out there like Legionaires," he barked. "Move like you've a brass band tooting at your heels. You've had your first taste of action already, men; now act like it!"

And then he led them down the gangplank and onto the platform.

Ricky's heart was pounding furiously as he peered eagerly at the faces of the men who apathetically watched the disembarkment. There were perhaps ten of them. Three were officers, Ricky knew instantly from the gold braid on their blue tunics.

None of the other seven was Clark.

Ricky felt a swift surge of bitter disappointment. But, he realized, an instant later, this certainly wasn't the Cepani Legion garrison in its entirety. Clark might be anywhere around the place. He might even be out on patrol duty. There was still certainly hope of finding him here.

They were on the landing platform, lined before the space transport ship, and Sergeant Marlow was stepping forward to greet the three officers of the Cepani garrison.

Even the Officers of the garrison looked weary and somewhat disgusted, Ricky realized as he saw their expressions. But all of them were clean shaven and turned out with military shine. They hadn't let their weariness or disgust send them to seed.

Then Ricky saw that all their space boots, those of the officers and seven men alike, were covered with a thick, chalky, gray substance. He frowned at this.

Marlow came back from the officers, then. "You men are already assigned to quarters. Break formation and hustle over to the barracks. Your new Commanding Officers will look you over later. If you hurry with your cleanups we'll be in time to join mess."

The weary contingent of newly arrived Legionaires broke ranks immediately, some removing their space helmets and gauntlets, others leaving them on as they trotted toward the end of the landing platform toward the barracks at the other side of the fortress.

Ricky walked wearily behind them. He had removed his space helmet and for the first time had a chance to thoroughly scratch his neck and wipe the perspiration and grime from his features. He was one of the last to the edge of the landing platform, and when he arrived there and looked down the ladder that led to the parade ground his jaws fell open in thick dismay.

The newly arrived Legionaires who were already off the platform and down on the parade ground were stamping around with hoarse curses of bitter disgust. Stamping around in chalky, gray dust that lay at least four inches thick over the entire terrain!

Yenka came up behind Ricky and looked down. He too stared with disgusted disappointment.

"It's awful!" he cursed. "Damn dust! Damn place! Choke damn men to death!"

Another voice sounded behind them, and they turned to see Carroll staring cynically down at the parade ground.

"This, my friends," he said sarcastically, "is the lovely rich soil of that most charming of asteroids, Cepani!"

Ricky merely stared at him wordlessly. . . .

RICKY and the others of his contingent had washed and changed to crimson fatigue tunics some thirty minutes later. And in the small mess hall of the Cepani garrison they had their first meeting with their new comrades, some twenty of them.

It was learned in the course of the meal that two patrols of five men each were out on duty and would be in shortly after mess. On the right of Ricky at the long mess table was Carroll, who seemed more talkative than ever before.

"The food is at least passable," Carroll declared. "And if we don't have to slough around in that damned dust too much none of us will choke to death. I'd much rather die with my boots on than by dust strangulation."

Ricky still felt no closer to Carroll, and still considered him worthy of suspicion. But the fact that they had been together through a brief conflict with the *Malyas* seemed to give him a little more reason to ignore the ex-jewel thief less.

"I thought you were averse to dying with your boots on," Ricky observed.

Carroll laughed. "So I am, old boy. So I am. And I still don't intend to do so."

Ricky ate on in silence.

"You're pretty anxious about something or other, aren't you?" Carroll observed a moment later. "I've noticed that your eyes can't stay in one place longer than a second."

Ricky flushed. "You're too damned observant to suit me."

Carroll shrugged, went on eating, then paused once more. "You expect, or hope, to find someone here, don't you?" he asked.

Ricky looked at him levelly. "Perhaps," he said.

"Friend?"

"You'd like to know every last bit you can ferret, wouldn't you?" Ricky blazed. "Why in the hell don't you concentrate on your food, Carroll?"

Carroll shrugged his wide shoulders again. "Sorry if I was prying, old boy. I just thought I could be of some help. There's a chap named Werts at this garrison—a Werts other than yourself, I should say. That your man?"

Ricky almost choked on the liquid he was drinking. He was flooded with mingled emotions, rage at Carroll for having learned so much, and wild relief to realize that he had at last found Clark. For it must have been Clark!

He held back his fury at Carroll.

"He's not in this mess hall," he said evenly. "How do you know he's here?"

"Out on patrol duty," Carroll said, his eyes watching Ricky's expression carefully. "I saw his name posted on the board in front of the Commander's Office here — the Patrol Assignment Board. Your name was the same as his. So I imagined from that and your other rather strange anxiety in actions, that you were looking for someone and that this other Werts chap was the man."

"Very clever deduction," Ricky said. "I'm thankful for your information, but I don't particularly like the curiosity that prompted you to get it."

Carroll smiled in what he imagined to be a disarming manner. "I still insist, old boy, and this should be further proof, that it would never hurt the situation any if you were to throw in with me. We could work very well together."

Ricky disregarded this and went on with the motions of eating. But he didn't actually touch his food after this, for his mind was too filled with the elation of having at last found his brother. The waiting for the signal that mess was over was almost more than he could stand, so great was his eagerness to get out to the landing platform to wait for Clark's patrol to return.

WHEN the signal came, Ricky was first on his feet. He almost ran from the mess room. A quick glance across the parade ground and up at the landing platform showed him that no patrols were in as yet. The big space transport ship that had carried him here from Tromar was still there, however, and engineers were working over its rocket tubes to get it in shape for its return voyage.

Ricky then raced to the office of the Commanding Officer. On a Patrol Assignment Board, just outside the door of the office, Ricky found what Carroll had said he'd seen there. Clark's name on the list of men on patrol duty.

Ricky lighted a cigarette and stalked nervously up and down the corridors of the barracks for the next ten or fifteen minutes. He knew that Clark's patrol wouldn't be in until another patrol had readied itself to take off in place of it, and when he finally heard the throbbing of atomic motors out on the landing platform, he almost shouted with relief. It meant that a patrol was getting ready to go out, and what was more important, was waiting for Clark's patrol to come in.

Ricky moved out of the barracks and onto the dusty parade ground. Quickly, he trotted over to the landing platform and ascended the ladder that brought him up to its shining surface.

One space patrol fighter was being warmed up, and beside it—at the far end of the platform, away from the big transport—stood five Legionaires, veterans of this garrison, who were clambering into their space gear.

On the platform behind the space patrol fighter, a mechanic was checking over a swivel mounted steamgun before placing it in the gun turret of the ship which was being readied.

Ricky walked over to the group, and the five men getting ready for patrol looked curiously at him, almost appraisingly, as if trying to judge from his walk and actions what sort of replacements they'd been given this day.

Flicking his cigarette over the side of the landing platform Ricky addressed the nearest of the Legionaires who was slipping into extra insulated space boots.

"Patrol should be in pretty soon, eh?" Ricky asked.

The Legionaire nodded. "Any minute. It's already overdue. We've been here too long already."

"See plenty of action here, I imagine," Ricky said casually.

The Legionaire gave him a swift glance and then broke into hoarse laughter. "Hell, buddy. Action is an understatement at Cepani. Wait'll you *really* get a taste of those *Malya* devils!"

Ricky flushed at the Legionaire's scoffing reference to the attack on the transport. Evidently these men, veterans by comparison, were skeptically doubtful about the staying powers of the new replacements to their garrison.

"Tough babies, eh?" Ricky asked. He peered upward into the dusk. The Legionaire followed his gaze. Ricky saw nothing, but the Legionaire was suddenly waving his arms.

"There's our patrol coming in!" he shouted to the others.

Ricky blinked, and then he saw it, a small dot high in the murky heavens.

One of the mechanics was on his feet. "Hell," he shouted. "That ship is in trouble!"

The Legionaire nodded excitedly, grimly. "You're right. She's limping in!"

Then the men on the platform were cursing and moving swiftly around him. How they had discerned that the patrol fighter was coming in in bad shape was more than Ricky could guess, but he wasn't concerned wtih that nearly as much as he was with the awful premonition that assailed him.

For that was Clark's patrol, and if it was in bad shape that meant that something might have happened to Clark!

The dot was growing larger and larger now, and the men on the platform had stopped running excitedly around and were waiting stolidly watching it draw closer and closer.

The next minutes that passed seemed like an eternity to Ricky. He wasn't aware of how long he stood there before the trim blue space fighter patrol ship finally settled sluggishly to a landing on the lower end of the platform.

RICKY was with the rest of them as they dashed across the platform to the side of the badly disabled craft. He was, in fact, the first one to the door of the cabin, and even as he tugged it open a charred, unpleasant odor assailed his nostrils.

Three men lay dead, their bodies gruesomely burned, in the cabin of the fighting craft. Ricky was pushed aside as other Legionaires clambered into the ship. Then he was forcing himself to follow them inside, forcing himself to look closely at the baked features of what had been Legionaires to find that none of them was Clark.

Then they were tearing open the bulkhead door that led to the compartments where the two space pilots sat. They dragged out a limp body that Ricky knew immediately to be dead. It was all he could do to peer at the face. Not Clark—it wasn't Clark!

Sobbingly, praying and cursing in the same breath, Ricky forced his way through the bulkhead into the forward pilots' compartment. Two Legionaires were lifting a third gently from behind the controls of the craft, a third was removing the man's space helmet.

Ricky saw the familiar red thatch of hair that was his brother's trademark. Red hair on a head that rolled limply from side to side as they carried the body from the compartment.

"I don't know how in the hell he got back," one of the Legionaires was repeating over and over again. "I don't know how in the hell he got back!"

Ricky crowded close to them, gazing down at the man they held in their arms. Clark's handsome face looked up at him. But those laughing eyes were

closed, and the strong mouth was twisted, frozen, in anguish, while his head continued to roll limply from side to side. . . .

CHAPTER V

Brothers in Hell

"GOD," Ricky cried, "Oh, God!" His mind was a blaze of searing grief and anguish and he followed dumbly, like a man in a trance, as the still form of his brother was carried from the scarred space fighting craft.

There were others outside the disabled ship when they stepped out onto the landing platform. Legionaires who had dashed to the platform the moment the news of the disaster had reached the barracks. And in front of the press of men around the ship, Ricky saw vaguely the stern, tired face of the Commanding Officer.

He was directing the situation calmly, any emotions he might have had cloaked behind his efficient handling of the disaster. His voice came to Ricky foggily, as if from a great distance.

"Take that man," his finger was pointing at Clark, "to our emergency ward immediately. There might be a chance."

"I don't think so, sir," one of the Legionaires was saying. "I think he's already dead."

"Take him to the emergency ward!" the Commanding Officer's voice lashed out like a whip.

A path was cleared in the press of bodies, and Clark, lifted to a stretcher, was carried through this by two Legionaires. Ricky followed dully behind. A hand reached out and caught his shoulder.

"Stand back from there, buddy. You're not a mascot for that cot!"

Ricky looked up and saw the face of a noncom unknown to him. His fist snapped into a crashing blow before he was conscious of willing it. The noncom, mouth red with blood, staggered back. Ricky turned dully, scarcely conscious of what he'd done, and started after the stretcher.

Sergeant Marlow loomed up before him.

"What's wrong with you, Werts?" he shouted redly. "Have you lost your mind?"

Ricky looked at him dully, shaking his head puzzledly like a man under hypnosis. "No," he said thickly, slowly, "no, that man, that man on the stretcher is my brother."

Marlow looked at him in amazement. He gulped once. Then his hand touched Ricky's arm. "Follow along, Werts," he said simply.

Ricky turned away and followed after the stretcher. . . .

LATER, it must have been three or four hours later, Ricky slumped dully on a bare bench before the door of the emergency hospital of the garrison. He had been that way, staring blankly at the corridor walls, scarcely moving a muscle, for what had seemed to be eternity.

Inside the ward there had been sounds, murmuring voices. And Ricky had bleakly tried to learn from these scant sounds what was going on in there.

Yenka, on hearing the news that was flying through the barracks, had come to Ricky to do what he could. Stumblingly, he had tried to express his sympathy, his best wishes, and tried to press on Ricky a carton of cheap cigarettes, Yenka's most priceless possession. He had left eventually, however, realizing that there was little he could do until word was learned of Clark's chances.

Ricky still waited for that word even now.

And suddenly the door of the emergency room opened. A young Lieutenant Physician appeared in his white tunic. He looked at Ricky an instant, while time hung breathless, then asked, "You are his brother?"

Ricky was already on his feet, shaking his head affirmatively, too choked inside to say a word, utter a sound.

"Better get back to your barracks," the young lieutenant medico said kindly. "The corporal, your brother, has pulled through splendidly. He'll be in shape to talk to you tomorrow possibly."

Ricky's knees suddenly felt weaker than tissue. He held to the corridor wall for support. Cold sweat stood out on his forehead, but he was grinning, grinning like an idiot.

"Thank God," he said insanely, over and over again, "Thank God!"

The Lieutenant Physician smiled understandingly. "Get back to your barracks, Legionaire," he said. "That's an order."

RICKY went back to his barracks. But he did little sleeping that night, for all he could think of was the almost tragic circumstances under which he'd finally reached Clark.

And when the siren bugle sounded that following morning, Ricky was the first man to dash from the barracks. Back outside the door of the emergency ward once more, he found himself sympathetically sent away by an orderly who assured him that Clark had improved through the night vigil.

At mess, Carroll was the most vocally inquisitive member of Ricky's contingent.

"So it was your brother you were looking for, eh?" Carroll asked smilingly.

Ricky nodded. "Yes. I suppose it's barracks conversation by now." He wasn't any more inclined to chatter with Carroll on this occasion than any other.

"Odd, a brother combination in the Outer Space Patrol Legion," Carroll mused aloud.

Ricky's glance was glacial. "Odd, the fun you have prying into things that are none of your damned business!"

But as usual, Carroll seemed quite impervious to insult. "Sorry," he grinned, "I guess I'm too fascinated by thinking of angles. A brother combination in a set-up like this certainly points to the possibility of a lot of angles in the background."

Ricky's eyes narrowed. Again he had the feeling of uncertainty as to how much the blond Legionaire really knew. But it seemed too impossible to consider that the ex-jewel thief would know anything about the reasons that brought Clark and himself into the Legion. Reasoning this way, Ricky dismissed the suspicion.

"He's greatly improved, your brother, I understand," Carroll said a moment later.

Ricky nodded coldly and continued eating. Yenka, who sat on the other side of him, muttered something into his plate about Carroll, and when the mess was concluded, Ricky was on his feet and out of the hall before Carroll could pick up a conversation again.

Once more Ricky returned to the emergency ward. The orderly was still in front of the door, and Ricky waited around in the corridor, finishing a cigarette until the Lieutenant Physician arrived.

The young medical officer smiled and nodded to Ricky and went inside the ward. Impatiently, Ricky made another march down the corridor and, by

the time he returned to the door of the emergency ward, the Lieutenant Physician was poking his head out of the door. He beckoned silently to Ricky.

"He's able to see you for a few minutes now," the medical officer declared. "But I wouldn't advise you to talk about anything that might excite him. I'd also advise you to do most of the talking yourself."

Ricky nodded eagerly. The medico opened the door wider and Ricky stepped into the large, light, spotlessly white emergency ward room. Only one bed was occupied, and that was by a window. Clark lay in this bed, his head propped up slightly by pillows.

He had a few minor bandages on his chin, several more patched on his cheek, and his eyes were completely covered by bandages.

"There's a visitor for you, Corporal Werts," the young medical officer told Clark.

Ricky saw his brother's head turn in the direction of the young medico's voice.

Ricky turned to the Physician Lieutenant, asking a question with his eyes. The young officer nodded and smiled.

"Certainly, I'll step out of the room."

The door closed behind the medico and Ricky walked quietly over to the side of Clark's bed.

"Hello, Commander," he said. "You've had a hell of a scrape, but you seem to be as tough as ever." His voice was husky, blurred with emotion.

Clark's head turned toward him, as if he were trying to see through the bandages that covered his eyes. For a moment his jaw was slack in wordless astonishment.

"Ricky!" he gasped, after an instant. His voice shook. "Good God, it's you, Rick!"

Ricky placed a hand on his brother's arm. "Yeah, it's Ricky, Commander. Just as always I never catch you when you're not involved in some slam bang situation."

"But Rick," there was bewilderment as well as sheer elation in Clark's excited voice. "Rick, boy, what are you doing here?"

"It's a long story, Commander," Ricky declared. "It begins with my refusal to let a grand guy make a sap out of himself by heroic self-accusations."

CLARK'S expression suddenly changed, his face going grave. "I'll tell you about that, kid. I'm guilty as hell, just as I insisted I was at first. Sorry to shame you this way, Rick, but it's true." There was a stubborn ridge to the muscles of his jaw.

Ricky's fingers dug into his brother's shoulders. "We'll hash that out later, Clark. In the meantime you be a top-notch patient. At least you'll have your kid brother around to look out for you from now on in, you big hulking oaf."

The shadows left Clark's cheeks and he smiled. "Commander, eh? I passed that title on to you, Rick, remember?"

Ricky's voice was husky again. "Yes, I remember. And that's what you need from now on, Clark, a Commander to push you around."

Clark's expression became grave again. "I told you, Rick, on the other thing, I'm guilty as—"

"Ah, ah," Ricky placed his hand gently over his brother's mouth. "We'll talk about that later. Tomorrow, if you're well enough. But now I'd better duck out of here. You'll need your rest."

Clark raised his hand, caught Ricky's. "Thanks, kid. Thanks for everything. I, I, aw, hell, Commander, I should have known you'd track me down. I should have known you'd follow me."

"I stick," Ricky said simply. "Just the way I know you'd stick. Keep a stiff upper, Clark." He withdrew his hand from his brother's. "I'll be in to see you tomorrow."

"So-long, Commander," Clark said softly.

"No grin?" Ricky asked. "Long lost brother and no grin?"

Clark grinned.

Ricky laughed. "That's better, oaf. Until tomorrow."

Ricky turned at the door before he stepped out of the room. Clark was still grinning.

Out on the parade ground Ricky found Yenka waiting eagerly for him.

"How is brother?" Yenka asked earnestly.

"Swell, Yenk," Ricky said, patting the burly Martian's arm. "What seems to be eating you? You look worried."

"*Malyas,*" Yenka bit off the word distastefully.

Ricky's face went grim. "*Malyas?*"

"Last night," Yenka said, pointing skyward. "*Malyas* catch transport ship on way back Tromar. Khhhh-heech!" He made a gesture that showed a knife slitting a throat.

"They got the transport on the way back to Tromar?" Ricky gasped in horror.

Yenka nodded. "Night patrol pick up sight wreckage of transport ship drifting in space on way in with dawn."

Ricky considered this in horror. He hadn't known the transport was going to attempt a return voyage to Tromar last night. Neither had any of the others, for that matter. It was generally understood that they'd wait until daylight to leave Cepani. Obviously the night departure had been meant to avoid trouble with the *Malyas*. Obviously, too, that trouble hadn't been avoided.

Ricky recalled the charred bodies he'd seen in the space patrol ship his brother brought in, and promptly felt a little sick at the realization of what had undoubtedly happened to the pilots of the space troopship.

Instinctively he shuddered. "Anything else popping?"

"Along same trouble," Yenka answered. "Is rumor made that *Malyas* plan circle Cepani, wipe out garrison like before."

Ricky frowned. "Where'd you hear that? Certainly the officers would be aware of it."

Yenka shrugged. "Dunno where hear. Is around barracks. Tell that communications to Tromar, ev'vyplace else, cut off. No get word through for help. Officers try. No do."

Sergeant Marlow came around the corner of the barracks building, saw Ricky and Yenka, and hurried in their direction.

"Yenka," Marlow snapped. "Get to your quarters and get your gear ready. We might need you on a scout patrol job."

Yenka saluted happily and hurried away. Marlow turned to Ricky. The lines of worry on his face were too plain to ignore. Ricky had a hunch that this might indicate the authenticity of the rumors Yenka picked up around the barracks.

"Sorry about your brother, Werts," Sergeant Marlow said.

Ricky smiled. "It's all right now. He's pulled through. Just left him a little while ago."

Sergeant Marlow's face became embarrassedly troubled. "You didn't talk to the Lieutenant Physician?"

Ricky had a sudden, horrible sinking sensation.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I did, for a moment before I went in to see Clark. Why?"

Marlow was plainly wishing he had

bitten off his tongue. His face was flushed. Ricky forgot the other's ranking, grabbing him by the sleeve urgently, desperately.

"What do you mean, sergeant?" Ricky demanded. "For God's sake let me in on whatever's wrong!"

Marlow said softly, "I'm sorry, Werts, I thought you'd been told. Your brother's fine. That is, he'll be up and around in no time. But he's blind, kid. He'll never see again!"

CHAPTER VI

The Siren Shrieks

FOR a moment Ricky stood there, too sickly stunned to say a word. His face was drained of blood, his senses reeled in horror. Clark blind—blind!

Marlow's hand was on Ricky's shoulder, shaking him gently. "Easy, kid. It's not as if he'd died. You still have your brother alive and almost in one piece. He was lucky, kid. Lucky as hell. He'll be around in almost no time."

Ricky looked up wordlessly at Marlow. He shook his head slowly from side to side.

"No," Ricky said. "No." He passed his hand tremblingly across his eyes, and the significance of the gesture made him recoil as if from his own thoughts.

Marlow's fingers dug deep into Ricky's shoulders now. "Snap out of it. He's alive. He's perfectly intact. His eyesight is all he's lost. Snap out of it, Werts!"

"Yeah," Ricky said, suddenly sickly resigned. "Yeah, that's all he's lost—just his sight!" There was no mistaking the bitterness that shook his voice.

Marlow said very softly, "Have your gear ready inside of an hour, Werts. You may be assigned to scout patrol duty also."

Ricky nodded, saluted mechanically. Marlow slouched away in the thick gray dust of the parade ground.

Unconsciously Ricky turned back toward the building which housed the emergency ward. Clark was there—living in darkness from which he'd never emerge.

Behind him, across the parade ground and up on the landing platforms, Ricky heard the muffled throb of space patrol fighting ships being warmed up for duty. Still plodding onward through the deep layers of gray dust, Ricky continued toward the emergency ward building. He was less than forty feet from the entrance when he saw a tall, wide shouldered, lithe-hipped blond Legionaire emerge and look somewhat furtively around.

It was Carroll.

Somehow seeing him coming from that building filled Ricky with an instant's swift surprise and suspicion. This was gone when Carroll saw him and grinned.

"Hello there, Werts," Carroll greeted him. "Glad to hear your brother's pulled through so well."

Ricky's lips went tight. Obviously Carroll hadn't heard that Clark was blind yet. Ricky nodded and tried to smile. No matter how much you despised a man, you couldn't freeze him when he was offering friendly greeting of that sort.

"Thanks," Ricky said briefly.

Carroll paused. "Came over to the ward to see if the Lieutenant Physician was around. Had a message to give him from one of the noncoms."

"Find him?" Ricky asked.

The question was innocuous enough, but Carroll seemed to hesitate for a fraction before answering. "No," he said after an instant in which he flushed slightly. "No, he wasn't around there anywhere." Then he added quickly,

"Nasty rumors flying around, aren't there?"

Ricky nodded grimly. "The *Malyas*, you mean of course."

Carroll nodded. "Yes. Our communications are supposed to have been cut off completely, too, I understand."

"Bad," Ricky said tersely.

"Very," Carroll agreed. "Walking back to the barracks?"

Ricky shook his head. "Just going to drop back to peek in on my brother for an instant. Then I've got to get back to the barracks and haul out my gear. Might be assigned to a scout patrol sometime within the next hour or so."

CARROLL looked disappointed, started to say something, changed his mind, grinned, and strode away. Ricky watched him trudge through the thick gray dust of the parade ground for an instant, then turned again toward the entrance to the emergency ward.

As Ricky stepped into the building he almost collided with the young Lieutenant Physician. Then he stepped back and saluted. The young medical officer put out an arm to halt him.

"Werts," he said quietly, "there's something I have to tell you."

"I know," said Ricky evenly, fighting back any emotional recurrence. "I just heard about Clark's blindness."

The young Lieutenant Physician swore softly in condemnation of himself. "I'm sorry, Werts. I meant to tell you before you entered the room, then I decided to let you know after you'd seen him. I was called away momentarily, and you'd left by the time I returned."

"That's quite all right, sir," Ricky said huskily, his voice betraying his emotions for the first time. "I understand."

"Otherwise he's doing splendidly," the young medico said in quick assurance, as if trying to negate his other words. "He has the recuperative powers of an ox. It wouldn't surprise me to see him walking around tomorrow."

"Thank you, sir," Ricky said. He started to move away, then hesitated. "Legionaire Carroll was here a moment ago looking for you, sir. Said you weren't around. He had a message from a noncom."

"Carroll?" The young lieutenant frowned. "The tall, blond chap? The one with the wide shoulders?"

Ricky nodded.

"Why, that's odd," the young medico declared, sincerely bewildered. "I met him as he was coming out of your brother's room. Your brother was sleeping at the time, and Carroll had persuaded the orderly to let him in for an instant to sort of silently pay his respects. When he passed me coming out of the room he didn't say a word about it—just saluted and went off."

Ricky frowned. "He was in to have a look at Clark, you say?" There was something distinctly suspicious about Carroll now, Ricky was certain. Something ominously suspicious.

THE young lieutenant nodded. "And you said he told you he'd been looking for me. He must have forgotten it, which would be quite impossible under the circumstances in which we passed one another. That's really very odd."

Ricky's jaw was hard. "It is more than odd, sir," he said very softly. "It's damned strange." He paused. "You say my brother was sleeping?"

"He still is," said the lieutenant. "The orderly didn't let Carroll go much beyond the door because of the fear that he'd wake your brother. The orderly was in the room all the time, or

I should say, during the very brief time Carroll was there."

Ricky shook his head. "I don't quite understand his interest, unless it was prompted by knowing me."

"Perhaps that was it," said the medical officer vaguely.

Ricky saluted and started to turn away once more.

It was then that the silence was torn by the low, terrifying scream of the bugle siren.

The lieutenant went rigid, as did Ricky. The siren stopped, then began again. The same low, screaming whine pierced the air.

The young lieutenant's face went white. He turned to Ricky.

"Better get to the barracks immediately, Werts, that's the alarm siren. This garrison is about to be attacked!"

But Ricky had already started toward the door. He'd learned his alarm signals in primary training. And hearing the "attack" siren sounded under these circumstances brought him immediately back into the harness of the Legion. He turned once, as he started through the dust of the parade ground, to satisfy himself that the medico would be taking care of Clark. Then he bent his head and raced for the barracks . . .

CHAPTER VII

Attack Alarm

AT THE barracks Ricky found a scene of frenzied activity. Legionaires, dashing up and down the aisles of cots, were shouting to one another and hurriedly climbing into space boots, and bringing forth fighting gear.

Ricky had no time, now, to think about the strange actions of Carroll; and even the thought of Clark's tragedy was pushed to the back of his mind as he struggled into space boots and strapped atomic pistol holsters to his sides. This was action. This was space warfare. This was what he and the rest of the Legionaires had been toughened and hammered into. Ricky was a unit, a cog, of a fighting machine now. There was no time for him to be anything else.

The siren bugle was picking up the alarm call again and again, sending it wailing over the garrison. The sound of it quickened heartbeats, sent pulses hammering and fighting blood pounding in the flesh of all these Legionaires.

Yenka appeared briefly beside Ricky.

"*Malyas,*" he said. "Like I hear rumor—*Malyas!*" The burly Martian's white grin flashed happily as though this hour was what he had been living for.

Ricky nodded, grabbing his electra-rifle and his space helmet.

"Parade ground?" he asked.

Yenka nodded. The Martian carried his space helmet under one arm, his electra-rifle was slung over his massive shoulder. Two atomic pistols were strapped to his sides, the duralloy butts of them gleaming like twin death rays.

Ricky paused to throw his equipment momentarily on the cot while he drew on his space gauntlets. Then Yenka was helping him sling the electra-rifle over his shoulder, shoving his space helmet under his arm.

Legionaires were already dashing from the barracks and out to the parade ground where they quickly formed ranks. Ricky and Yenka ran behind a group of these, sprinting through the thick dust of the parade ground to the half-formed platoon commanded by Sergeant Marlow. Breathlessly, they took their places.

The alarm siren bugle was still wailing the attack signal.

Legionaires continued to dash from the barracks to the formations on the

parade ground, taking their places, grim, tense, expectant. The ranks were at last filled, and suddenly the attack alarm siren stopped. The silence became loud.

From his quarters, the Commanding Officer of the Cepani garrison suddenly appeared, followed by his staff. Moments later he stood before the ranks of his under-officers and men, his eyes sweeping across the formations in grim satisfaction.

Then he spoke, his voice harsh and commanding.

"This comes sooner than we had reason to believe it would, men," the CO declared. "The *Malyas* are moving in on us, you all know that much by now. The patrols we have out there at the moment are doing a valiant job of standing them off—but the ring will break at any moment and the devils will be swarming in on us." He paused, his cold eyes sweeping once more along the ranks.

"The garrison before us was wiped out—slaughtered—completely by these same devils. This very rotten dust you stand on, rank and nauseous, is the scorched hell their attack left behind them on that occasion. The garrison that so valiantly perished defending Cepani before us was completely surprised. The *Malyas* had never penetrated this territory before that." The Commanding Officer coughed. "We are not unprepared. Those of you who have been here for more than a month are well trained in the defense of this fortress. Those of you who have but recently arrived here as replacements," he paused to look at Sergeant Marlow's outfit, "are the best men from our primary training centers. We haven't had time to train you in the garrison defense of Cepani—you last arrivals. But you are trained in space warfare, and all of you have had your first taste of its actuality during your voyage here."

Ricky wondered what the CO was leading to.

"As a consequence," he went on, "you will be given the task of relieving our defending patrols in space. The veterans of this garrison—those who have been thoroughly trained to its personal defense—will remain to man the very walls of the garrison. We have decided this the most logical move. That is all. Your superior officers will give you your instructions. I need not remind you that the honor of the Outer Space Patrol Legion demands the avenging of the last massacre of the Cepani garrison. Good luck, Legionaires!"

THE Commanding Officer turned on his heel, and strode swiftly through the heavy dust back to the headquarters building. Three of his under officers followed behind him.

There was a momentary silence, then the voices of the subaltern officers were barking commands to the ranks. Ricky heard Marlow's husky voice.

"That's our assignment, men. You know its importance. Due to the scarcity of our numbers, the patrols will be divided into five groups of four men each. Each of the patrols will have a leader, with the exception of the squadron fighter which will be commanded by me." He paused a moment. "Step forward, those men whose names I call, and receive from me the lists of the men in your patrols. You men are to lead your individual space fighter craft. You will keep in constant communication with my squadron fighter."

Sergeant Marlow took off one of his space gauntlets and dug a beefy hand inside his tunic pocket. He brought forth four white slips of paper.

"Higgens," Marlow barked. A short, wiry Legionaire stepped forward and

the sergeant handed him one of these slips.

"You're in charge of the first space fighter craft," he said. "The men to be with you are on this list."

Higgens turned, read three names, and three more Legionaires stepped from the ranks.

"Proceed to the space landing platform," Marlow said. "Your craft has been assigned to you. Wait there for further instructions." Higgins saluted and led the three men of his crew at a brisk trot to the landing platform.

Marlow looked at one of the slips in his hand an instant, then raised his head. Ricky saw the sergeant's eyes meet his.

"Werts," Marlow said.

Ricky stepped forward, heart pounding, and took the slip Marlow, extended to him. Ricky saluted, turned, and looked down at the list.

"Yenka," Ricky read aloud, "Carroll, and Mepha!"

Yenka, beaming happily stepped from the ranks and joined Ricky. Carroll, smiling faintly, sauntered from his position also. Mepha, the third man in Ricky's patrol, a fat, round, little Junovian with a bald head and a hairless face, stepped forward also. Mepha was a topnotch man with an atomic cannon.

"Landing platform," Ricky said. Then he saluted Marlow once more and started in a trot through the heavy dust of the parade ground toward the landing platform some eighty yards away. He could hear the others running behind him, and then he was ascending the duralloy ladder to the landing platform, while the throb of atomic motors and the spluttering of preliminary rocket bursts filled his ears.

On the platform, Ricky was met by a perspiring mechanic who asked, "Second patrol?"

Ricky nodded. "Werts in command," he answered. The words sounded strangely reminiscent, and then for a fleeting instant he recalled the games that he and Clark had played as kids.

The mechanic jerked his thumb to a sleek, blue, bullet nosed space fighter craft at the far end of the platform.

"Your ship," he said. "She's well warmed. Guns've been checked, everything set."

Ricky turned to Yenka, Carroll, and Mepha. "That's our baby," he pointed. "You three get over there, and I'll stand by here to get any last instructions from Sergeant Marlow."

Yenka and Mepha nodded and started over to the craft. Carroll, grinning annoyingly, lingered to say, "Sure thing, chief." There was amused mockery in his words.

THE third group of Legionaire was on the platform, now, and Higgins, in charge of the first group, had joined Ricky to wait for Marlow's final instructions. The leader of the third group took his place beside them, as did the leader of the fourth patrol who appeared on the platform minutes later.

Then, at last, Marlow stood before them. "Ships will leave the platform in the order of patrol number originally designated," he barked above the now deafening roar of rockets and motors. "We'll meet at the edge of the first zone defense belt, and I'll give each ship its assignment by communication," he said. "Good luck."

Marlow turned then, and trotted toward the squadron fighter—the central command of the group—a larger, fatter, more heavily armed craft.

Ricky wheeled and trotted down to the far end of the platform where Yenka, Carroll, and Mepha waited beside their ship.

"All set!" Ricky shouted. "Let's go!"

They climbed in before him, slipping on their space helmets as they did so. When Ricky followed them into the cabin of the space fighter craft, he held up a gauntleted hand, showing four fingers. The three nodded, adjusting the receptor buttons on their space suits to the band he'd indicated.

Ricky adjusted his glass turreted helmet, set the ban receptor on his own space suit.

"Mepha will take the rear atomic cannon bubble," Ricky announced into the micropanel of his helmet. Inside his own glass turret, Mepha's bald, round head nodded and grinned. The little Junovian went back to his post.

"Yenka will cover the electraguns on our under bubble," Ricky announced then. "And you, Carroll, take care of the port and starboard porthole defense."

Yenka pushed back a section of the flooring in the space craft which revealed a small compartment just large enough for him to fit into. It was a veritable tiny fortress from which he could—by use of the deadly electraguns placed there—successfully cover the ship from any attack from beneath.

Carroll grinningly took his seat along the starboard porthole of the ship, stacking the electric-rifles of the others in order beside him for sniping use. Ricky waved a gauntleted hand, and opened the door leading to the pilot compartment in the fore of the ship.

And then Ricky was behind the instrument panel of the craft, checking navigational dials and inspecting the trigger releases on the brace of small atomic cannon which were his to command in flight.

The pilot compartment was basically designed for the use of two men. The co-pilot generally being responsible for the gunnery while the pilot handled the ship itself. With the skeleton crew system, however, it was Ricky's duty to be both gunner and pilot.

Ricky checked the instruments a second time, and flicked the switch that connected him with Marlow's larger squadron fighter.

"Werts, in command of second patrol," Ricky announced. "Coming in, sergeant."

Ricky spoke into the same micropanel of his space helmet as he used to address the crew. The exception was that he had flicked a second receptor button which would send his voice through the communication panel on instrument board before him. He waited a moment.

Marlow's voice came in. "Second patrol, stand by. Second patrol, stand by. First patrol leaving, first patrol leaving."

Ricky waited, tensely, gauntleted hand on the throttle that would throw the atomic motors into full speed.

Seconds seemed to trickle by. Ricky's heart pounded. Out there in space the *Malyas* waited. Even at this moment they were trying to break through the ring of patrol ships standing them off from Cepani.

Then Marlow's voice came in again. "Second patrol—second patrol—second patrol!"

"Second patrol standing by!" Ricky announced.

"Up and at 'em, Werts," Marlow's voice came in. "We meet at the first zone defense belt. Don't engage in combat under any circumstances until you receive your assignment."

Ricky leaned forward, giving the first pressure to the atomic motor throttle.

"Second patrol—leaving," Ricky announced. He shoved hard on the

throttle, the ship shuddered for a fleeting second. Ricky eased the power an instant, then the back of his seat was pressing hard against his spine and they were hurtling out into space.

THE blackness of the night flashed by, silvered by starstream as the space fighter ship climbed farther and farther out to meet the void. Ricky's fingers were tense on the controls, his face anxious, his forehead beaded with tiny drops of sweat.

Minutes flicked by, and Ricky checked his instruments once more, altering the course of the ship several degrees, sliding the nose more directly toward the rendezvous agreed on with Marlow.

More minutes flew by, while Ricky, preoccupied by his calculations, continued to check his instrument panel. Then finally he leveled the space craft out, sending it in a wide, wheeling arc. Through his vizascreen he could see the nose of the ship of the first patrol down below them, circling lazily in the same waiting maneuver. This was the place of rendezvous with Marlow's squadron fighter.

Ten minutes later Ricky saw the third patrol space ship wheel into vision on the vizascreen, higher than his own ship, and begin the same wheeling maneuver. Ten minutes after that, the fourth patrol ship appeared, still higher, and swung wide in identically the same tactical waiting maneuver.

Marlow's squadron fighter appeared at last, taking a position higher than them all. Ricky flicked the switch that connected communications with the larger ship once again.

"All four patrol ships!" Marlow's voice sounded. "Come in on the connection."

Ricky announced his ship after Higgens had chimed in. The leaders of the other patrols followed in order.

"Higgens' fighter is assigned to my patrol," Marlow's voice declared. "We are to relieve those patrols already on duty and in action against the *Malyas*."

Ricky frowned impatiently. Higgens was assigned to duty with Marlow, and if Ricky knew the sergeant well enough, he realized that the red necked Legionaire would select the fightingest, most dangerous spot for himself.

"Patrol two, Wertz in charge," Marlow's voice came in again, "will proceed immediately to—" and then he gave the navigational directions to the spatial location, "where it will be expected to destroy the *Malyan* forces established there to cut off Cepani Garrison communication with Tromar."

Ricky felt a swift chilling thrill along his spine. This was action. This was an assignment equally as dangerous as that which Marlow had selected for himself.

"When this has been accomplished," Marlow's voice went on, "the second patrol is to return immediately to Cepani for further instructions if it is possible." The last four words had an ominous ring to them.

"I repeat my navigational directions to patrol two," Marlow picked up again. And then, while Ricky made rapid chart notations on the table by his instrument panels, Marlow repeated his navigational instructions.

"That is all, patrol two. Proceed immediately—as instructed. Good luck!"

Ricky cut himself back in. "Second patrol," he said, "proceeding at once as directed." He snapped off the switch, checked his instruments with his navigational readings, allied them swiftly, and threw the space fighter craft over and down in a rolling dive, picking up tremendous velocity and straightening out after the outline of the first patrol ship had blurred by them.

"On the way!" Ricky muttered tightly to himself. Then he settled down to following his navigational directions.

RICKY had a fair idea of what he could expect to encounter on his assignment. The *Malyas* had a particular method of ambush attack, and it seemed to be this same method that they were now employing.

It depended first on superior strength, second on a cunningly unexpected attack. They had both advantages in this present attack on Cepani. Thirdly, their mode of ambush included the complete severance of communications bebetween the garrison under attack and any other posts that might rush them aid. In this instance they had blanketed Cepani in silence, making it impossible for the post there to communicate with Tromar, the nearest and largest Legion replacement center.

And it was up to Ricky, and Ricky alone, to destroy this blanket of silence that had been thrown around the Cepani Garrison by the *Malya* attackers.

Yenka appeared at the bulkhead door to Ricky's forward compartment somewhat later. He held up four fingers to indicate that he had something to say. Ricky flicked the receptor button on his own space suit and nodded.

"We have assignment?" Yenka asked.

"Right," Ricky answered. "I was waiting for one of you to stick your nose in here. We're to break up the communications jam the *Malyas* have belted around Cepani."

Yenka grinned, tremendously pleased by this information. He nodded happily, enthusiastically.

"Pass it on to Carroll and Mepha," Ricky instructed.

Yenka nodded and disappeared, slamming the bulkhead door behind him. Ricky settled back once again to a careful rechecking of his chart and instrument panel. It would take several more hours to arrive at his dangerous destination.

Those hours were not long in passing. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

Battle in the Void

RICKY saw the long, sleek, silver outline of the *Malyan* engineering vessel in his vizascreen when he was still several space miles away from it. It was almost the size of a space battleship, but was lower and more heavily turreted.

Beneath some of those turrets, Ricky knew, were concealed heavy guns to repulse attack, and beneath the others were the vital machines which were this moment sapping all space-radio power from the belt that had been thrown around Cepani. Sapping that communication power from the void, so that the Cepani garrison's frantic signals of appeal would never get through to Tromar.

And then, but the fraction of a minute later, the *Malyans* aboard the long engineering space craft realized his approach. He could see small dots, figures that must have been *Malyans,* rushing swiftly along the open deck spaces of the craft. Then, it seemed scant seconds later, three silver bullets streaked out into the void from hidden catapults.

Fighting craft, *Malyan* scout fighters, sent forth to intercept the attack on the engineering vessel!

Ricky reached forward swiftly and flicked the button on his instrument panel which connected him with the gun positions on his own craft.

"Action!" he barked. "Three enemy fighter ships just launched from engineering vessel. Bearing in on us soon, stand by your posts!"

He flicked the switch back and turned his attention to the controls of his craft, throwing the ship into a nose-up climb. Running his tongue over dry lips, Ricky kept his eyes alternately moving from his instrument panel to the vizascreen. The enemy craft were deploying in a wide formation, each obviously preparing to take a section of Ricky's craft in their attack on it.

The *Malyan* fighters, however, couldn't outclimb him. Ricky smiled in satisfaction as he realized this, and made swift plans accordingly as they followed him upward, dropping behind with every passing second. From the center of his vizascreen, Ricky could see the foremost *Malyan* ship.

If they couldn't outclimb him, then they couldn't outdive him.

The *Malyan* ships were faster than his own on straight stretches. Ricky knew this and had already resolved to keep the hell off straight stretch maneuvering.

His target selected, Ricky set himself for his maneuver. He flicked the communication switch to his gun positions. "Hang on tight," he shouted. "Hang on tight and prepare to fire as we dive. Center *Malyan* ship will be your target!"

Ricky pulled back on the control levers, flipping the ship over on its back and down swiftly in a straight dive. Directly in the center of his vizascreen, rushing at him with incredible speed, was the center *Malyan* craft.

Ricky's gauntleted fingers found the trigger bars controlling the brace of atomic cannon in the nose of his craft. He was fighting back the physical nausea accompanied by the dizzying force of his terrific dive.

And then the nose of the silver *Malyan* craft was less than two hundred yards away, and already the pilot was trying desperately to veer off from Ricky's ship, which, if it followed its dive, would surely crash headlong into the other craft.

But on either side of the *Malyan* craft were companion fighters. And any veering to either side would inevitably be at the cost of both the veering craft and the ship it collided with on its side.

The *Malyan* craft was trapped. Its pilot elected to take the only other course, just as Ricky had prayed to God he would. The silver space fighter pulled up and over, in a frantic effort to dive back and out of the way. The broad silver outline of its belly gleamed in Ricky's trigger sights for as long as he needed.

HIS fingers pressed the firing bars. Bolts of orange flame spat forth from the nose of his ship, blasting the silver *Malyan* craft into splashing thousands of searing red fragments!

The two companion ships to the annihilated *Malyan* fighter passed in twin flashes of silver on either side of Ricky, still climbing as he dove, unable to check their speed in time to turn and pursue him.

Ricky grinned grimly. One out of the way.

But the others would be in pursuit at any moment. He began to pull slowly out of his dive, careful not to black himself out with any too sudden maneuver.

Now, suddenly, in his vizascreen he saw the outline of the momentarily unprotected engineering craft of the *Malyas,* and just as suddenly remembered the vital importance of his mission. The downing of the defending space

fighters was incidental to the destruction of this craft that had blotted out all communication.

Ricky's hand found the electra-bomb releases below his instrument panel. He leveled off slightly, then threw his ship into another dive. In the viza-screen, the engineering craft of the *Malyas* loomed swiftly larger, wider. Some of the silver turrets on the deck of the long slim craft rolled back and black snouts of cannon appeared.

Ricky gritted his teeth. The craft had more to protect it than its fighter ships. But this was his chance. He continued the dive. The vizascreen showed the engineering craft vastly larger now, and Ricky pulled back slowly out of his dive, releasing electra-bombs as he did so.

Hell broke loose beneath him. Two of the electra-bombs found their marks and exploded aft and amidships on the silver craft. And at the same instant, red flashes of flame puffed from the snouts of the defending cannon, the blasts from the bolts rocking Ricky's ship like a leaf in a gale.

Ricky climbed, then. Climbed as swiftly as he could. The two silver fighter scouts of the *Malyas* would be somewhere up above him, he knew. But he had to climb out of range of the guns on the deck of the engineering craft.

And as he climbed, the first of the remaining two silver *Malya* space fighters dove down on him in attack.

Ricky rolled over hard to the right, and as he did so, felt the vibration of Mepha's rear atomic cannon shaking the ship as the little Junovian gunner opened fire.

There was a blinding burst of flame somewhere on the tail of his ship, and Ricky instinctively realized what had happened. The superb little Junovian gunner had spied the second *Malyan* fighter diving in on the rear flank and had destroyed it with an incredibly accurate burst of fire.

Ricky felt a fierce flame of pride. The Legion trained men to fight like the very devils of hell!

Two down—one to go!

But that one was accounting for itself with a deadly hail of *neonfire*, blue bolts of streaming death, working on the top of Ricky's ship from an uncovered position as it relentlessly continued its dive. Ricky continued to roll his craft hard to the right, instinctively waiting for the vibration that would signal Yenka had opened fire from the belly of the ship, which was now up toward the diving *Malyan* craft.

THERE was no thudding vibration from Yenka's electraguns. Time hung in hell while Ricky waited for that vibration. Desperately, he flicked the communication - to - gun - bubble switch.

"Yenka!" Ricky screamed. "For the love of God, Yenk, Fire!"

Yenka's voice, tight and despairing, came back.

"Guns jammed. Guns jammed to hell, Reeky—s, soooreee!"

Ricky's eyes went wide in horror. Yenka, there in the gun bubble, belly up to the diving *Malyan* craft, with his guns jammed. Wildly, Ricky tried to throw the ship back on its stomach to give his burly Martian comrade cover. But it was too late—grim seconds too late.

"Agggghhhheee!"

Yenka's scream gurgled to Ricky's ears, along with the *snicking* hail of *neonfire* shattering the bubble covering in which the Martian gunner had been covered.

Ricky continued his roll-over, sickeningly aware that he had heard the happy - go - lucky, hard-fighting Mar-

tian's voice for the last time—in a death scream!

But there was no time to think of that now. Every second was precious, every twisting gyration through which he put his ship meant the ultimate difference between life and death.

And then the *Malyan* fighter had streaked past, veering down to the right as it did so, to keep out of range of Ricky's fore guns in counterfire.

Ricky jammed the nose of his ship upward, then, climbing for every last millimeter's advantage he could get, a new scheme in mind. Below him lay the partially disabled engineering craft of the *Malyas*. Below his right beam the silver streak of the *Malyan* fighter ship was leveling out of its dive and beginning a counter climb.

Deliberately, Ricky slowed the power of his climb, giving the silver enemy ship to the far right of him a chance to gain in the twin maneuver.

The remaining *Malyan* ship would try to outclimb him, Ricky knew, for height was a precious advantage in space combat. But this time Ricky was willing to sacrifice that advantage. This time he wanted to get the *Malyan* ship on his tail.

And his enemy continued to climb, continued to gain greater height. Ricky was leveling off now, watching his vizascreen intently. The *Malyan* ship had noticed his new maneuver, and now that it had a height advantage was also leveling. Ricky flicked the communication switch on his instrument panel.

"Mepha!" he barked. "Get ready to fire. There'll be a silver streak on our tail pretty quickly."

"Not for long," Mepha's voice came back confidently. "All set, Ricky."

Ricky snapped the switch. In the vizascreen he could see the engineering ship directly below him. In the upper corner of the screen he was able to see the *Malyan* fighter ship wheeling around to get on his tail. He waited tensely, giving the silver ship its chance to complete this maneuver. Then he waited for a fraction of a second longer, while the *Malyan* craft, picking up the incredible speed it possessed on straight stretches, dashed toward him.

Then Ricky threw the controls forward, pointing the nose of his ship directly down at the engineering vessel. Behind him, now, less than a hundred yards away, was the *Malyan* space fighter. Ricky saw its nose drop as it followed him down in his dive, sticking to his tail.

THE back of Ricky's seat was pressing hard against his spine, and dizziness was assailing him again. The engineering craft was looming larger and larger on his screen. The *Malyan* fighter was still on his tail. But Ricky wasn't utilizing full power for his dive. He was giving his pursuer a chance to draw closer. Close enough so that it would be directly within the same firing range that Ricky was. Close enough so that the engineering ship below would have to withhold its own defensive fire for fear of downing the silver *Malyan* fighter along with Ricky's ship.

The *Malyan* pilot was realizing the trap he'd fallen into, realizing that he'd formed a protective shield for Ricky's craft unwittingly. But it was too late. He was already in a peak velocity dive. He couldn't pull out of it and away from Ricky's tail without tearing his ship to shreds.

And the engineering ship below was forced to withhold its fire!

Ricky's gauntleted hand found the electra-bomb release. They caught the engineering craft in five sections, shattering it from stem to stern in belching explosions of hellish fury, accomplishing his mission as ordered!

Slowly, still staring into the viza-screen at the smouldering ruins that remained of the engineering craft, Ricky pulled out of his dive. Momentarily, in the wild surge of elation he felt, he had forgotten the remaining *Malyan* space fighter.

And that momentary forgetfulness was almost enough to cost Ricky his life and the lives of his command.

A whirring streak of silver shot past the nose of his craft. In leveling off after pulling out of the dive, Ricky had forgotten that the *Malyan* ship was still on his tail, and that in a level stretch he could be easily overtaken by it. He felt the vibration of the *Malyan* craft's *neonfire* lacing along the sides of his ship, felt a second jarring thud on the nose of his craft, and looking startledly through the forward porthole of his compartment gasped in astonishment.

A *Malyan,* space suited and carrying a ray weapon, had boarded his ship and was even now advancing cautiously along the nose of the craft toward Ricky's compartment!

SWIFTLY Ricky cursed, recalling that this daring boarding stunt was a favorite trick of the *Malyas.* One *Malyan* would disable an enemy craft at the expense of his own life if need be!

Ricky's hand flew to the communication switch. He flicked it swiftly.

"Carroll!" Ricky shouted. "*Malyan's* boarded us. Coming along the nose!"

Carroll's voice came back, almost nonchalantly. "Rightho, I'll greet the devil!"

Ricky watched the strange, space suited creature advancing slowly, laboriously, along the nose of the ship, cursing his own inability to remedy the situation. The creature could not be reached by Ricky's cannon fire, and there were no other weapons within the compartment which would be of use against him.

Then Ricky was aware that the weapon the *Malyan* carried was spitting flame. And he was also suddenly conscious of the fact that the creature was crumpling, twisting, under the fire of Carroll's electra-rifle!

The creature pitched sidewards then, and for an instant fought for balance before pitching off the nose of the ship. Ricky flicked the communication switch again.

"Nice work, Carroll," he shouted.

"Picking of ducks," Carroll's voice came smugly back to him.

Ricky cut the switch, turned to the navigational chart and made calculations which would take them back to Cepani. For the job was done. The silver *Malyan* ship, after seeing the disaster that overtook their boarding stunt, was dashing off, unwilling to continue the combat further. *Malyans* stayed to fight only when the odds were in their favor, never when the odds were even.

Ricky swung the nose of his ship around, feeling suddenly weary. The appeals to Tromar would get through, now, the interference in the communications was eliminated. And Yenka lay dead in the lower gun bubble. Minutes later the bulkhead door of his compartment swung open and Carroll stepped in, grinning. He pointed to his receptor button.

"Next move?" Carroll asked.

"Back to Cepani," Ricky said, turning his head slightly. "We're to get further instructions there."

Carroll nodded. "That's what I thought," he said.

Ricky didn't see the heavy wrench Carroll held in his hand. He didn't see it until it had swung high and started to descend on his helmet in a vicious arc. Then it was too late, for

the jarring concussion of the blow on his shatter proof helmet knocked him senseless. Blackness, warm and sticky, settled in on him . . .

CHAPTER IX

Carroll Pegged

FOGGILY, Ricky could hear the throbbing of rockets and motors against the blanket of pain that dulled his senses. He was conscious of moving his arms and legs, trying to turn himself. And then he opened his eyes.

He was on the landing platform of the Cepani Garrison. A round, bare face was bending over him. Mepha's face.

Ricky sat up, dazedly trying to wipe the cobwebs from his mind. There was a nausea in the pit of his stomach and he felt like vomiting. Vaguely he began to remember what had happened.

"Better now?" Mepha grinned.

Ricky felt his head. His helmet had been removed. And now full recollection hit him. His expression was one of tight anxiety. He grabbed Mepha by the arm.

"Carroll, where's Carroll?" he demanded, fingers biting deep.

Mepha grinned. "Carroll all right. Carroll bring in ship after you knock head on bulkhead."

Ricky was trying to rise, and Mepha was helping him to his feet.

"You mean," Ricky grated, "Carroll told you I'd had an accident, was knocked out?"

Mepha nodded. "I came up to forward compartment. Saw Carroll kneeling over you. He saw you have accident. He take ship back."

Ricky realized now why he was still alive. Carroll had been interrupted by Mepha after he'd knocked Ricky out. He didn't dare do away with him while the Junovian looked on.

"I drag you back into compartment, main compartment, leave Carroll up front to take in ship," Mepha explained. "No think you come around so soon. Accident like that usually keep man unconscious many hour."

"Yes," Ricky nodded grimly. "Evidently Carroll thought so, too. Where in the hell is that skunk?"

Mepha was faintly puzzled. "He back at barracks," he declared. "Help coming in from Tromar, now. Garrison sitting pretty. *Malyans* going 'way —fast." He grinned.

Ricky took a few tentative steps, found he could maneuver under his own steam. He started for the ladder leading down to the parade ground.

"Where you go?" Mepha cried anxiously. "You weak, you too sick yet to try run around."

"I've got a nasty puzzle to clean up," Ricky shouted. Then he was scrambling down the ladder and his feet were hitting the thick dust of the parade ground. Seconds later he was racing toward the barracks. He found them deserted, save for one Legionaire.

"Seen Carroll?" Ricky demanded.

The Legionaire nodded. "He just left. Said something about an assignment. But he headed toward the emergency ward first."

Ricky wheeled and dashed from the barracks. The emergency ward! Clark was there, and Carroll had gone there just before the *Malyan* attack had started. Gone there, for some mysterious reason, to see Clark. And now, after knocking Ricky out, and wanting for some mysterious reason to kill him, Carroll was heading for Clark once more!

There was no one in the corridor of the emergency ward building when Ricky arrived there. There was no

sentry posted outside Clark's door. Ricky heard the sounds, then, sounds coming from behind that door. Sounds of struggle, muffled, desperate!

The door was locked from the inside. Ricky stepped back four paces and crashed into it with his shoulder. It tore slightly. Ricky stepped back again. The sounds of struggle were louder inside the room. Ricky heard muffled curses.

He crashed his shoulder into the door again. This time the lock tore through the jam and sent Ricky sprawling into the room and against someone's legs.

It was pitch dark in the room, and Ricky's groping hands felt that the legs were clad in space boots. They wouldn't be Clark's. He wrapped his arms around them, pulled backward. There was a loud curse as a body crashed down on Ricky—Carroll's voice!

THEN Ricky was rolling out from under the body, his fists smashing again and again into a face. The body suddenly went limp beneath him. Ricky leaped to his feet, sought the wall switch, and flooded the room with light. There at his feet, his face a bloody mess from the effect of Ricky's fists, lay Carroll!

"Ricky!" a voice in the corner gasped.

Ricky wheeled, and for the first time saw Clark, swaying in the corner of the room with a heavy duralloy chair raised in his massive arms.

"Clark!" Ricky sobbed. "Clark, old rock, he didn't get you!"

Clark's bandage was torn from his head, and there was a fresh cut on the side of it, next to the half healed wound already there. The fresh slash was bleeding.

"He tried to, God knows," Clark said weakly. "He entered in the darkness—that was his mistake. We were on even terms that way. I could tell where he was by his breathing. When I called out and he didn't answer, I knew something was fishy. I grabbed everything I could get my hands on, made a dive for him, and started pounding. I—" Clark had crossed the room to Ricky's side, and was staring down at Carroll, his mouth open.

"My God," Clark gasped. "It's Lebanc!"

But Ricky, too, was staring in open mouthed astonishment. Staring, however, at Clark. His face was a mixture of emotions. "Clark," he shouted wildly, "Clark—*you can see!*"

His brother looked up at him blankly. "Why not—" he began.

But Ricky had grabbed him by both shoulders. "You can see!" he repeated again and again. "A blow of Carroll's must have jarred your vision back!"

Ricky was laughing and sobbing and pounding his brother on the arm ecstatically. "You were supposed to be blind, Clark! Blind for life! They didn't tell you, and I couldn't bring myself to it. But a blow gave us a miracle. Your sight is back!"

Clark was grinning now. "And that isn't all that's back, Rick. That isn't all that's back by a long shot. The person you see sprawled on the floor before you, the person you called Carroll, is really a chap named Lebanc. A lousy skunk I searched through hell to find. The murderer of my competitor. The guy who committed the crime I was tagged for."

Lebanc, alias Carroll, stirred slightly and groaned. Ricky, still grinning like an idiot, resisted the savage impulse to kick him in the head. . . .

WHEN sanity returned to the little garrison on Cepani some few

hours later, and the replacements from Tromar — after sweeping the space lanes clear of the attacking *Malyas* —took over the patrols to give the men of Cepani's gallant garrison a much needed rest, Carroll, or Lebanc, confessed in full to the Divisional Commanding Officer.

Clark and Ricky were at the murderer's side during the proceedings to see that he told his story correctly. And by fitting the pieces together, the thing became clear.

"I was certain Lebanc, alias Carroll, had taken refuge in the ranks of the Outer Space Patrol Legion," Clark had stated. "I joined to find him."

"But you were slightly ahead of him," the Divisional Commander observed. "He joined after you did."

Clark nodded. "That's right. But he did join, as I'd had a hunch he would, thank God."

"Never imagining that you were already in the Legion," Ricky added, "until he found out by mistake while going through the Divisional Reports on the sly. Your electraphoto was there, and he recognized it. That's when he began to get ideas about escape. He knew he'd need a confederate and picked out me as his foil."

Clark nodded. "Never suspecting you were my brother," he said.

"Then it wasn't until his arrival at Cepani, where fate threw the three of you together, that he knew something had to be done fast," the Divisional Commander declared.

Ricky nodded this time. "But fate played into his hands. Clark came in from patrol that day, badly wounded and blind as far as anyone knew. That's when Lebanc, or Carroll if you will, had to visit you to make certain you were the man he feared. Fortunately, he didn't know you were thought to be blinded for life. He merely presumed your eyes were bandaged and that you'd be up and around shortly to identify him."

Clark grinned ruefully. "And I would have been killed then and there by our chum, if a sentry hadn't been with him when he peeked in on me. As it was, when the attack alarm sounded, he had to postpone his plans until return. By then, however, he was wondering how much Ricky knew about the situation. That's why he tried to kill Ricky on the way back to Cepani after the destruction of the *Malyan* engineering base."

"Mepha prevented him from doing that," Ricky broke in. "But he figured I was out for quite a spell, and when he brought the ship in he headed for Clark, intending to kill him, then escape on his own in one of the patrol fighters."

The Divisional Commander smiled faintly. "But you broke in in time to save your brother's neck, in true Legion pattern, eh, Werts?"

Ricky clenched and unclenched his fists subconsciously. "I was ready to kill Carroll," he admitted.

The Divisional Commander grinned frankly this time. "Sometimes," he observed, "I'm inclined to believe we plant the killing instinct too strongly in you men. However, I'll admit you had a natural reaction."

Ricky turned to Clark. "What about the note you left me, and the body that was found in your wrecked sports spaceship?"

Clark shook his head. "Some poor devil about my size and weight that Carroll, alias Lebanc, killed and planted after I'd left. And just part of that note was mine. The confession stuff was forged in by our blonde comrade."

The Divisional Commander sat back. "Lebanc, or Carroll, is being

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SATURN—World of Rings

by WILLY LEY

What are the planets really like? Here is a scientific and authoritative picture of the Saturnian surface

NO. 4

ON March 12, 1781 the planet Saturn was the most famous of all the planets of our solar system. Or one should rather say it was *still* the most famous planet on that day. Two unique features made it so, one of them its famous rings that still are awe inspiring to every observer when he sees them for the first time, even if he thinks that looking at innumerable pictures of Saturn hardened him a bit against the impressiveness of this miraculous view.

The other distinction was that Saturn was the frontier guard of our solar system, the outermost planet, the outpost farthest from the sun. But that distinction collapsed the very next day, when Herschel discovered Uranus with his new reflecting telescope. And since then Neptune and Pluto have been added as even more distant outposts and it is by no means impossible that even a trans-plutonian planet might be found one day on a photographic plate.

But even though Saturn is not the outermost planet anymore it is still the only one possessing rings, a small replica of Sol's asteroid belt. And till 1939 Saturn also possessed the largest number of moons of any planet in the system, ten moons, against the nine of Jupiter and the four of Uranus. Last year, however, two more moons of Jupiter were found so that Saturn lost that distinction of having the largest number of moons also.

Still it is unique in one more respect and it is very unlikely that this additional distinction will be taken away so very quickly. Saturn is the only planet with a density less than that of water! It is the lightest planet in the system; "lightest" refers, of course, to specific gravity, not to the actual mass. The large outer planets, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune have always been classified as light planets, as distinguished from the heavy inner planets. The average density of Mercury, Venus, Earth, Moon and Mars is that of copper ores, say around five and varying individually within narrow limits. Practically all of the asteroids belong to that heavy class too. The average density of the large outer planets is a little higher than that of water, say like glycerine. But Saturn is lighter even than that, its average density has to be compared to ether or alcohol.

These low figures for the large planets probably all mean one thing: that there is a mistake somewhere on the way that leads to the determination of

The surface of Saturn is cold enough to liquefy the atmospheric gases. The surface temperature should barely approach 100° C. above absolute zero. From the surface, the rings are a tremendous spectacle of beauty

a planet's average density. And astronomers are even in agreement as to the nature of the mistake, but they cannot do more about it than point at that spot and say, "Here's where the mistake comes in." It is the uncertainty about the depth of the atmospheres of these planets. Astronomers measure the ball as they see it, in the case of Earth the "astronomical diameter" would reach not from one point at the equator (say: sea level in the bay of Albemarle of the Galapagos Islands) to the opposite point on the globe, but from the clouds above Albemarle to the clouds above the opposite point. The mistake would amount to three miles at most which would be negligible. But in the case of the large planets the mistake seemingly amounts to many thousands of miles, which is serious.

TAKING the planet and its atmosphere as a whole astronomers measure 67,000 miles from pole to pole and 75,000 miles at right angles to the axis of rotation. The disc of the planet is, therefore, perceptibly flattened, although not to such a high extent as that of Jupiter. Like Jupiter the ringed planet rotates rapidly, its day has been measured to be only a few minutes more than ten hours in length, the number of those additional minutes ranging from 12 to 38. Feeble belts can be seen on the surface of the cloud layer, their very feebleness apparently indicating that the activities that cause Jupiter's clouds—whatever their nature may be—are much less pronounced on Saturn. Besides the colors on Saturn range only from white to yellowish, there is nothing that could be interpreted as a mani-

festation of internal heat even if one wanted to do so. Thus, although there is naturally no certainty about that, it seems justified to think that actual conditions on the "surface" approach those that can be expected from the calculation of the amount of sunlight or rather sunheat received by Saturn. The average distance from the Sun is 886 million miles—and the "year" equals 29½ of our years—which should result in a temperature of about 100 degrees centigrade above absolute zero.

Saturn presents itself as a world of frightful cold, a world where only the very light gases like hydrogen and helium are permanently gases while all the other gases are either permanently frozen or at least liquids. The boiling point of some of the more abudant gases happens to be just in the vicinity of the average temperature, if the heat rises a bit during the short five hour day they may evaporate only to be condensed again at night. A violent sleet storm of frozen carbon dioxide and liquid oxygen and nitrogen is certainly a terrifying picture but it is all too probable that such sleet storms are not only a daily occurrence on Saturn but the normal condition all day round. Life as we know it is absolutely impossible on such a world and since we have no reason to believe that conditions were ever very much different we also have no reason to assume life in assumed caves where things might be more bearable from an earthman's point of view.

THE glorious spectacle of the rings stretching across the sky from horizon to horizon will not be seen by any living beings unless space explorers manage to land on Saturn in the more distant future and to establish a temporary outpost.

Saturn's rings, now the best known marvel of the sky, remained undiscovered for thousands of years although the planet itself was well known to ancient astronomers. It needed the invention of the telescope to see them and even then astronomers were uncertain what it was they were seeing. Saturn presented itself sometimes as a single planet, then again as a triple planet and in between as a planet with attachments of singular shape. Huyghens in 1655 was the first to see that these attachments were a ring, surrounding the planet completely but not touching it. So astonished and uncertain he was that he published his discovery only in the form of a series of letters which, when properly arranged, describe the phenomenon in a Latin sentence. That way Huyghens wanted to escape unnecessary ridicule, if he should be wrong, but reserve the priority of the discovery just the same. Other astronomers soon saw that he had been right. And in 1675 G. D. Cassini discovered the division named after him, Saturn had not only one but two concentric rings. The third ring, the so-called Crape ring was found by Galle in 1838.

The outside diameter of the widest ring is about 170,000 miles, the ring in the middle is the widest, about 16,000 miles while the width of the two others is about equal, a little more than 10,000 miles each. Cassini's division is 2,000 miles wide . . . but the thickness of the rings is only about 30 miles, some observers even claim only 30 kilometers (which is somewhat over 20 miles) while others concede forty miles.

How rings like that were possible at all was a riddle for quite a long time, especially since it was soon found that they are translucent and that stars could be seen through them. When it was finally proven mathematically that a solid ring of the actual dimensions at

the known distance from Saturn's main mass could not exist, realization dawned. It was suspected—and then proved—that the rings of Saturn consist of independent particles of matter, each moving around the planet in an orbit of its own. As to the size of these particles a popular conception say that they "range from grains of dust to small moons of several hundred yards in diameter. It seems, however, that it is mainly dust. Sudden changes in color have been observed frequently and a Canadian observer, Walter H. Haas, reported that "on November 11, 1936, 0:40 U.T., the rings were deep blue and contrasted strikingly with the yellow ball. Yet at 1:04 the rings were the color as the ball. On November 4, 1937, at 0:00 U.T., the rings were dull white but had become distinctly bluish by 1:00 . . . The color is probably to be explained by the size of the particles of the rings and the angle of incident sunlight. If the blue color is due to Rayleigh's scattering, it signifies that the dimensions of the particles are *less than .00055 millimeters.*"

As usual the answer to one question produces a number of other questions we would like to have answered. Of all the secondary systems of the planets that of Saturn resembles the solar system most closely. In both cases we see a central body surrounded by a number of smaller bodies, moving in stable elliptical orbits. In both cases there exists a belt of very small bodies, also in stable orbits. But due to the gravitational influence of some of the larger bodies that belt is broken up into several belts because the presence of the large bodies creates zones where orbits of small bodies cannot remain stable. As regards the solar system causes a main and a few minor divisions in the asteroid belt; in the case of Saturn's rings Titan, the largest moon, is responsible for the main and a few minor divisions. One wonders whether the Sun, seen from a point halfway to Proxima Centauri would appear ringed. The real question is, of course, whether the rings—or the asteroid belt—represent an "unborn moon"—or planet—or the remains of one.

EVER since the nature of Saturn's rings was established astronomical theories included one of the following two sentences. They either said: "before our moon took shape Earth was a ringed planet like Saturn," or they stated: "some time in the distant future Earth will be a ringed planet." The reason for the second statement was a calculation that had been made to find out what would happen to our moon if it approached Earth too closely. It was then found that a large moon could never fall on a large planet in one piece, that it could not even approach beyond a certain limit where the gravitation of the planet would cause such stresses that the moon would break up into fragments. This calculation is still valid even though it is more than unlikely that nature will ever demonstrate its validity. The reason for the first statement was another theory which said that moons normally start out as rings. A few chance concentrations then attract the other particles so that at first a number of small moons are formed that one by one unite with the largest one of them which then has no difficulties in sweeping up the remainder of the rings, even if it does get a few thousand meteor craters in the process.

Fact is that Saturn's rings still exist and that they do not show any condensations. Fact is also that they would not result in a large moon if condensed into a sphere of average density. Are

(Concluded on page 263)

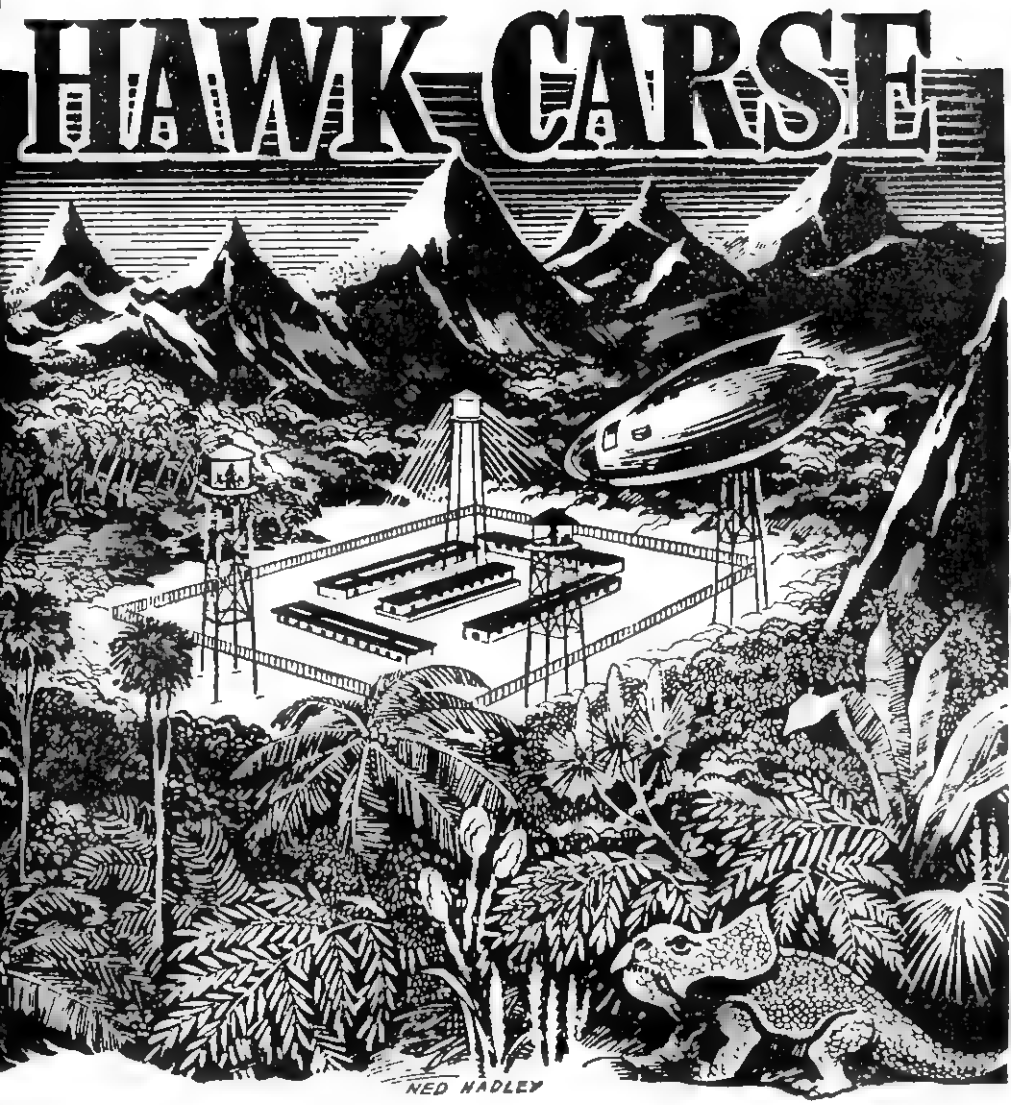
The Return of

Below him lay a hidden space-landing field

by ANTHONY GILMORE

Hawk Carse faced his greatest problem when he found that the sinister Kui Sui still lived; and with him seven other men who had died . . . !

HAWK CARSE



HAWK CARSE. Ku Sui. The Unborn Q. What magic lives on in these names!

Dead are the men who bore them, dead for nearly a century, yet the clash of their living wills made a discord that may even now be heard—faintly in the cold bare accounts in the histories, but still warm and stirring from the lips of the outlanders, yarning away a lonely hour in the far corners of space.

Never were three such foes. Q is confusion and titan; the Eurasian glitters with a dark evil brilliance, as fascinating as the eyes of a snake; but always the outland interest is in the slight, flaxen haired figure of Hawk Carse—he of the cold rages, the nerveless daring, of the spitting raygun and the phenomenal draw, of the instant resourcefulness and the stern code which would send him a billion miles to keep his spoken promise or avenge the blood hurt of a friend.

Carse's faithfulness to an obligation is nowhere seen more conspicuously than in what is called the Affair of the

Unborn Q. Readers of the history of that raw period will recall that this affair was the direct outcome of a preceding action,* which started when the power-lusting Dr. Ku Sui kidnaped five of the most outstanding scientists of Earth and assembled their naked brains in a case where they were made to function as a mighty thinking mechanism for the solution of his problems. Hawk Carse, faithful to a promise made to these Coordinated Brains, succeeded in forcing Ku Sui to transplant them back into living male bodies; and, acting in an acute emergency, they had to use the only bodies available—one, a yellow robot-coolie of Dr. Ku's, and the others the depraved bodies of isuanacs, drug-ravaged white men snatched from the jungles of Jupiter's Satellite III.

This was unfortunate; still the Earthcoming of the Hawk's party was a happy one, for they not only had the five brains safely transplanted, but counted as a bonus of security the death of Ku Sui and the vindication of old Master Scientist Eliot Leithgow, who had been a fugitive, unjustly suspected of the kidnappings.

But tragedy started at once. Four of the five kidnaped scientists had wives, and with news of the party's arrival these women flew to the bedsides of the patients; and there were heart-tearing scenes when they learned what had happened, and saw the bodies which now held the brains of their men. The press was shushed, but question rose in wild waves all over Earth. What really happened when the wives found the brains of their husbands in such horrible bodies? people asked. What did the women say, and what the men? Were the men going to live with the women when they had recovered? Did the wives really go insane after that first meeting, and was it true that one of the men committed suicide after seeing his wife's reaction to his body? For every question there were a dozen rumors.

For three months this went on, public interest hardly abating, and then, one black and stormy night, Hawk Carse acted, faithful this time to what he felt to be an obligation to the Brains; and it was out of the adventure thus started that there arrived the complex and powerful and puzzling and fearful Unborn Q.

CHAPTER I

"Diver" in the Sky

THAT night a nimbus hung over New York City and out of its boiling depths wave after wave of rain swept down heavily across the deserted streets below.

Had there been an observer he might have thought that no human being could have escaped drowning in that weight of water; but fish eyes or human instruments that could have pierced the descending wall would have been a peculiar thing.

A large aircar hung dangerously in the lower fringe of the nimbus, not a hundred feet above one of the higher of the city's up-piercing spires. Tons, hundreds of tons of water, formed above it and poured down over its curving back and sides, but it remained fixed there, engaged in a business no one could have guessed. The eyes of our fish might have seen the side door of the car open

* The earlier stories in this series appeared in another magazine ten years ago. They are of course out of print and cannot be obtained. Their titles, for those who may be interested, were Hawk Carse; The Affair of the Brains; The Bluff of the Hawk; and The Passing of Ku Sui. Each story was complete in itself; but the action followed in a continuous line. The present story continues in this line. Rabid readers might get the whole string as one novel in a book—if they interest a publisher!—Ed.

and a bulky figure step out, a figure that looked like a deep-sea diver. For a second the figure hovered there, resting one arm against the side of the car, and then it dropped rapidly in a vertical, controlled fall.

Never before had a man in a space suit appeared over the metropolis. This suit was self-propulsive, with tiny gravity plates designed by the Coordinated Brains. The man in it was Hawk Carse, the greatest adventurer of his space and time.

The red ray licked at the glass

Carse dropped surely through the angled blasts of water, passing vertically the upper spire of the great building, angling toward one of its sides, and then more slowly continuing down. From time to time the wind and rain brushed his bulky figure against the side, but the arms out, carefully, it continued to descend until it reached the 97th story; and there its fall ceased and it continued horizontally to one side. Six windows it passed, but at the seventh it stopped dead. Hanging in the rain-swept air Carse hinged back the mitten of his left hand, removed a tube-like apparatus from the belt of the suit, and pointed it at the bottom of the window pane.

A thin reddish ray speared out and at once was almost lost in a cloud of hissing, billowing steam. Quickly and evenly the pane was sliced all around its edge, until finally the wind blew it inside the room. Ray ready in his left hand, Carse at once floated in through the opening.

A moment later he reappeared carrying a large black box, and was again out against the rain-swept and dizzying side of the building.

Very rapidly now the figure rose, darting past the top of the building, past its towering spire, and on up toward the ominous black nimbus itself. At the lower fringe it stopped and waited. Soon the aircar appeared, swimming smoothly and surely to where it hung suspended. Again the side door opened, and Hawk Carse, with the box, disappeared inside.

SUCH was the brief first act of the adventurer that drowning night. There followed another, far different.

The car hung where it was a moment, then with a slow turn it slipped up inside the nimbus and was lost to possible sight. Four minutes later, over another part of the city, it dropped out of the cloud again and circled, as if seeking some particular spot.

It came to a stop over the Hospital for Mental Diseases. Again the bulky figure appeared in the door, stepped out, descended. As before, Carse seemed to know just what to do. Without loss of a second he streaked to the far edge of one wing of the building, slipped over the side, and plummeted feet first, story by story, downward.

This time he followed the vertical side of an outer fire escape, and at a certain floor, which he seemed to have some means of recognizing, he floated

over the iron railing of the landing. A moment later he was through the door and in the inner landing, and then, for the first time, the great feet of the bulky suit set down on solid floor.

Hawk Carse got out of the suit, and leaving it standing there jumped to the door. He listened a moment, then cautiously opened it, peeped out briefly, and passed through into a dim corridor. Like a shadow he slipped close along one wall toward a lighted place where this corridor intersected another. A little office was set up in the space, but the ward nurse who used it was not there so the Hawk went on by, and pushed boldly through a door on the right.

A young psychiatrist in white was writing at a desk there. He looked up in surprise, then rose.

"What do you want?" he demanded sharply. "How did you get up here unannounced?"

The man facing him was clad in a faded blue work shirt, open at the neck, and his coarse blue trousers did not reach quite far enough to hide a pair of old-fashioned rubber-soled sneakers. such clothes were conspicuous in a metropolitan hospital, to say the least—but men who looked at Hawk Carse rarely noticed his clothes, or even his slight, wiry, perfectly proportioned figure. They saw a cold, intent face beneath a surprising row of flaxen bangs, and a pair of straight-looking gray eyes that could turn to ice when he was displeased.

The Hawk's eyes turned colder now.

"Do you know who I am, Dr. Warren?" he asked in a soft, deceptive voice.

There was a brief silence while the rain beat monotonously on the window of the room. The young psychiatrist looked hard at the figure before him and faint recognition stirred.

"You are . . . Hawk Carse?" he half asked.

"Yes," was the answer. "You see I have some right to inquire about your patients. How are they?"

The man in white gave his visitor a frank smile of amazement.

"Did you come here at two in the morning to inquire about that?" he demanded.

"Yes," answered the Hawk curtly. "How are they?"

DR. WARREN felt that he had better not trifle with this man.

"Physically they are well," he said, "but mentally not so good. At the moment they're all in strait-jackets. There was another attempt at suicide today."

"Which one?" Carse asked.

"Estapp."

"His wife came again?"

"Yes. Early this evening. I had just come on." Lines appeared in Dr. Warren's young face. "It was pitiful," he went on, memory of it still fresh. "For days he's been alternating between the desire to see her and the fear that she'll again break down at sight of him—between hope that he may be able to reestablish some bond and the almost certain knowledge that there's no chance. Well, she broke down."

He sighed and looked gloomily away for a moment.

"I'm tough," he said, "but sometimes it gets me a little down too. What a unique and tragic predicament—the marvelous brains of these men finding themselves in bodies not their own—ugly, rotten, drug-ravaged bodies! Their brains hold such memories of success, and friendship, and love shared with the women of their choice; and now on the retinas of their wives and friends they can be nothing but strangers, repulsive strangers, whose words and feelings are only torturing parodies

of important things they once knew and long have been learning to forget.

"Estapp's wife is a good sport. She tries awfully hard to embrace the brain and disregard the body; but she just can't manage it. Never was there a more striking example of the dependence of the affections upon the impressions of the senses."

"Lady Norman is still undergoing treatment?" Carse asked.

"Yes. In the women's wing. She's the first of the wives to break down under her conflict. I wouldn't be surprised if Mrs. Estapp is with her soon."

"Cram?"

"Very depressed. And he's the lucky one, with his healthy coolie's body. Swanson, who succeeded in his suicide attempt—he was the luckiest," the psychiatrist added, bluntly. "Carse, I tell you, putting the brains into such bodies was a tremendous mistake."

"I had given them my promise," the Hawk said curtly. "We could not prevent Ku Sui's damage to their sustaining mechanism and we had but three hours to act. Only the four isuanacs and the coolie were available."

"Oh, I know, I know," the other said wearily. "You did all you could and Ku Sui performed a near-miracle. My personal belief is that the result would have been much the same no matter what bodies were used. Theoretically women may love a mind, but practically they love a body."

"WAS it Estapp's attempt that made it necessary for you to put straitjackets on every one?" Carse asked.

"Yes. The strange bond between their brains is still strong. It's as if each one were a part of the others. I remember you testified you saw them function as one brain in Dr. Ku's apparatus."

"Yes," said Carse. "In answering they always used 'I.' Ku Sui himself expressed surprise at this."

Dr. Warren smiled slightly.

"I know they surprised Meeker. He's the great sensitive we had here a few times.* The first time he was exhausted in ten minutes. Each of the brains worked individually, he reported, but above this activity there was a correlation that was too fast and complicated for him to catch.

"The bond is there even when they are separated," he went on. "But we always keep them together now. They prefer it, and do better."

"And at the moment they're all in strait-jackets," Carse said, frowning.

"Yes." The young psychiatrist looked at the slight figure before him with undisguised curiosity. "Did you really come out on a night like this just to ask how they are doing?" he asked suddenly.

"I want to talk with them," Carse answered coldly. "And I must have them rational. If at the moment they are not in their right minds, I want you to make them so for a while. You have the authority."

Warren was very much surprised.

"I have the authority," he said, "but by what authority do you request this? What is it you have in mind?"

"I won't tell you here," Carse answered incisively, "but you may be present. I want you to be present. It's

* It seems hardly necessary to point out the existence of unconscious mental telepathy as a common phenomenon of every-day life, or of the highly accurate results which are achieved with gifted sensitives in careful tests made under controlled conditions. The phenomenon has been a theory since the dawn of history; and beginning with the scientific experiments of Dr. Rhine, of Duke University, which began early in the twentieth century, the theory became a law, supported by scores of thousands of experiments and buttressed by mathematical analyses beyond cavil. —Ed.

a peculiar business. And it's urgent."

"You don't help me much. Your request is extremely irregular."

"My whole life is not what you might call regular," the Hawk said curtly. "I will take full responsibility."

Dr. Warren looked at him for a moment, as if making up his mind. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, all right—considering your part in their history," he said, then smiled. "You're practically a relative now, anyway."

Carse did not smile.

"Cram is the only one you need bring back, isn't he?" he asked.

"Probably," the psychiatrist answered. "He's still the dominant brain, just as he was in Dr. Ku's apparatus."

He went into a small adjoining room and reappeared with a tray containing several small pieces of apparati under a sterile transparent lid.

"Follow me," he said.

CHAPTER II

The Re-embodied Brains

HE LED the way to a large pavillion at the end of the corridor. Under a dim night light lay a row of four cots, each with the shadowy form of an occupant. The far wall of the pavillion was almost completely of glass, against which the rain beat in heavy, fitful gusts. Dr. Warren flicked on a light by the head of the farthest cot, and then Carse had the odd, unpleasant feeling that came to everyone in the presence of the four unhappy men.

The light was by the cot of the coolie. This body held the brain of the great physicist and electrical wizard, Master Scientist Raymond Cram—with Eliot Leithgow the only person in the solar system having the right to that title of honor.

The man lay flat on his back, his jacketed arms showing clearly under the blanket where they crossed over his abdomen and were held to the sides of the bed. Above the blanket his brutish face shone yellow in the light. The jaw was massive, with thin lips that kept twitching at the corners. His slanting brown eyes held on Dr. Warren, and kept jerking in their sockets as they followed his movements. Only when Carse half turned, to glance at the faces of the white men in the other cots, did the coolie seem to notice he was there. At once, then, the movement at the corners of his mouth ceased, and he remained with eyes fixed on Carse, even though the psychiatrist was exposing his right arm. Suddenly with a peculiar thick toneless utterance he asked:

"Who are you?"

"It's Hawk Carse, whom we told you about," Dr. Warren said kindly. "He's come to see you."

There was an odd expression in the coolie's oblique eyes.

"Did you bring Dr. Ku Sui?" he asked. He looked off to each side. "I don't see him."

"Ku Sui is dead," Carse said.

"No, I am dead," the coolie said. He articulated as if the brain of the Master Scientist Cram found it difficult to form these English words in a yellow body. "You must bring Dr. Ku Sui," he went on, "for only he can help me. I have a dead brain, and it must be removed so it can be buried with my body, for I am all dead."

"The suicide wish," the psychiatrist said softly without looking up.

Carse's lips tightened, and he looked away at the faces in the other beds. Three other pairs of eyes were staring at him, each out of the coarse-skinned, bloated face typical of those in whom the drug isuan had almost run its course. The slightly slavering lips of

two of the men said, almost in unison:

"I am dead." "I am dead."

"Hurry," snapped the Hawk irritably.

WARREN had finished painting the inside of the elbow of the coolie's right arm, and finding the germicide now dry he deftly broke the neck of an ampule, picked up a hypodermic needle and filled the cylinder, and made a small injection in one of the large blue veins. He sat back after that and waited.*

"Dr. Ku," the yellow man muttered. "Where is Dr. Ku?"

Hawk Carse watched his face narrowly. Outside, the rain kept sweeping the great window in recurrent waves, almost drowning the occasional faint, far distant rumble of thunder.

A subtle change came over the face of the yellow man. His eyes left the Hawk and went to Dr. Warren, then several times swung back and forth, returning finally to rest on the adventurer.

"You look familiar," he said thickly.

"This is Hawk Carse," the psychiatrist said cheerfully for the second time. "You saw his pictures in the papers. He's come to see you." Not changing his tone he added, for Carse, "He's all right now. They all are."

Carse studied the faces of the other three men. All now were looking at him with the straight calm gaze of the coolie.

"You recognize me—from the pictures?" he asked the three whites.

"I do," said the coolie.

"I was speaking to the others," Carse told the yellow man sharply.

Dr. Warren interrupted at once.

"But Dr. Cram is frequently the spokesman for all," he reminded Carse respectfully.

"Is this true?" Carse asked the three.

"Yes," answered the middle one.

The Hawk blinked. These psychological subtleties made him feel uncomfortable; all this was far out of his line. He turned back to the yellow man.

"All right," he said; "I'll just talk to you. I remember you were the spokesman for all the Brains when they lay without bodies in Dr. Ku's case."

"Your voice is familiar, too, Mr. Carse," was the edged answer.

"You are unhappy?" Carse asked shortly.

"This is not ecstasy."

"Do you regret that I kept my word and forced Ku Sui to place your brain in your present body?"

"What would you guess?"

"You have tried to commit suicide?"

"They have told me so."

"Would you like, if it were possible, to have once again your body of four years ago when Ku Sui snatched you away?"

"Oh God!" broke from the yellow man at the sudden touching of this hopeless desire. "Why do you torture me?" he exclaimed then with strong reproach.

The Hawk turned and looked at the three white bodies. Mixed expressions of desire and reproach were on all their faces.

"Would you like it?" he asked them.

"I would!" one of them blurted.

Carse looked back into the eyes of the coolie. He took his time before

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* The relief of acute mental disease by the administration of drugs began before the middle of the twentieth century, when it was found that insulin and other glandular products had a beneficial effect on certain types of what was then called insanity. The writer has never seen it pointed out, but even such a commonly used drug as aspirin has this effect within smaller range; for it dulls distress of the mind and for a time allows the continuance of more normal functioning. The cheering effect of alcohol on many people may be another case in point.—Ed.

going on.

"It might be possible," he said then in a low firm voice.

FOR a moment there was complete silence except for the sweep of the rain on the window. Five pairs of stunned eyes held on him. Dr. Warren got up from his chair by the yellow man's bed.

"Carse—" he began angrily, but the adventurer froze him with a look.

"Sit down on that chair and keep out of this," Carse ordered in a low whisper. "I like you, Warren," he went on, "but I will not hesitate to kill you if you interfere." He laid a hand on his left front pants pocket. "In here is a raygun," he said. "Perhaps you have heard that I'm able to use it."

Dr. Warren subsided—completely. Carse turned back to the four patients.

"It *is* possible," he announced.

The silence continued as before. Then the lips of the coolie moved.

"My body has long since decayed. Explain."

Carse took a deep breath.

"I feel a heavy responsibility for this situation you find yourself in," he said, almost gently. "Back on Ku Sui's asteroid I took you at your word when you expressed a desire to be restored to bodies. It was no fault of mine that there was an emergency, and the only ones available were those you now have.

"None of us at the time foresaw what might be your reactions when you found yourselves in these bodies. We were far too rushed to consider things like that. But our work has turned out bad. Physically the transplantations were successes; psychologically they were all failures. Swanson has committed suicide. Others of you have tried. The wives of two of you are in a serious mental condition. One of them is right now a patient in this building. The others may yet be here. As for you, you face the prospect of spending the remainder of your lives under watch, or in those straitjackets, or in a padded room."

He paused, and looked slowly and intently into one face after another. Tears flooded some of the eyes and ran sideways down past the men's ears; but no one spoke.

"This whole situation can be adjusted," the Hawk went on crisply. "In three months, or a little more, each one of you can go back to wife and friends just as you were before all this happened. But to do it you, as you now are, will have to die."

"For God's sake, explain!" exclaimed the yellow man. "Isn't my body lost? Isn't Ku Sui dead?"

"Yes, your bodies are lost, and Ku Sui is dead," the Hawk said, somewhat sharply. He paused for a moment, and then plunged.

"EACH one of you, of course, knows the laws governing the propagation and transmission of sound waves. You know the complexity of the sound wave of, say, the human voice, when examined minutely as it appears on a strip of film. You know that every object in the universe when made to vibrate will give off its own individual and characteristic sound, whether or not that sound is heard by the human ear. Don't you?"

"Yes," said the coolie.

"All right. Now, given a sound wave as recorded on a strip of film, and given the means, the object that made the sound wave could be re-created by a reversal of the first recording process, could it not?"

There was a brief silence.

"Theoretically, yes," said the coolie.

"If so," concluded Carse, "could not

the technique be extended, so that a sound film record of a human voice might be used to re-create the human body that made it?"

Gasps and brief cries came from the men. The coolie's eyes fairly burned into those of the Hawk.

"This has been done?" he demanded.

"During your absence from Earth this has been done," Carse said.

Silence followed this statement as four keen minds digested its implications. The voice of Dr. Warren cut sharply in.

"Mr. Carse."

The adventurer snapped around, and when the psychiatrist saw his eyes he was suddenly more respectful.

"I don't mean to cause any trouble," he said, "but I haven't heard of this. Surely I should have."

"No one has heard of it," the Hawk said crisply. "One man invented the technique, and that man, recognizing the great danger if it were indiscriminately practiced, kept his mouth shut, only showing it to one other person, Master Scientist Eliot Leithgow, shortly after his return to Earth.*

"Eliot Leithgow, thinking of you, told me. I, with my feeling of responsibility toward you, decided to act. We made plans. He investigated and found there were in existence sound strips made of all your voices when you spoke at the Interplanetary Scientific Congress here in New York just before the kidnappings. He also located the recorder from which the sound strips were made, and arranged so that I could gain access to it. It is a strict requirement that the recorder and strip used in the first place be the ones used in the embodying technique.

"He took the strips. I have just picked up the recorder, and it is now in an aircar above this building. In that car are Ban Wilson and my man Friday. Eliot Leithgow is standing by in our space ship.

"They are all waiting for you at this moment. They will take you to Leithgow's secret laboratory, out in space. The thing will be done there—the same place where your brains were put into these bodies. We have assumed as a matter of course that you will jump at this opportunity."

THE Hawk stopped speaking and waited for the reaction of his strange audience to his still stranger proposition. At the moment the caliber of the brains in the four ugly heads might have been guessed, even if not known, for each man was silent, each brain thinking deeply, considering many angles, like the marvelous thinking mechanisms they were. There was no stumbling or emotional dodging around corners.

"Why do you come with this proposition, and not Dr. Leithgow, who is my friend?" the coolie asked after a moment.

"Leithgow wanted to but I wouldn't let him," Carse answered. "There was risk."

"You have of course overstated the possibilities," the yellow man went on thoughtfully. "For I won't have my old body, and I won't be able to go back to my wife just as I was. To speak for myself, there will exist two brains,

* The re-embodying technique has rightly been called the most dangerous invention of all time. If widely applied by unscrupulous men it could be used to create vast armies, the weapons to arm them, and even perhaps the tanks and aircars and space ships to carry them. In the personal lives of the members of society, too, it would wreak havoc; for what would happen if two men, exactly alike, insisted on working at the same desk, fought to wear the same clothes, and clamored for the affections of the same wife! Or vice versa. Multiplied by any number you please.—Ed.

one mine, in the body I now have, and one like mine, in a body like the one I once had. Probably my wife would accept the substitute, and probably I should approve; but you bring no comfort to the deep me, my ego, my 'I.'"

The Hawk faced the coolie squarely. He said:

"It is a condition of the whole affair that once the others are created, each of you must commit suicide."

Another silence followed this ultimatum. Only their eyes moved slightly as the four men thought the idea through. Before, they had been ready enough to commit suicide, but the startling news Carse had brought them complicated the patterns of their wills to live. The yellow man spoke again.

"If I refuse to go?"

"I shall take you anyway."

"So. Well, you could do it, for I am confined and helpless; but what if I should refuse to commit suicide afterwards?"

"I then should kill you myself," the Hawk said quietly. He waited. "Well, what's your answer? We must get away before the storm lets up. Do we go with your consent or without it?"

"With it," said the coolie.

"And you?" the Hawk asked, looking at the man in the next bed.

"With it."

"And you?" he went on, looking at the last two.

"With it." "With it."

The Hawk sighed. "Good," he said. He took a small apparatus from his belt, fingered some knobs on it, and raised it to his lips.

"Yes," he spoke into it. "Come."

HE REPLACED the apparatus and turned to Dr. Warren.

"You are coming with us; we need you to look after your patients," he announced. "We know you are engaged to be married, so we have prepared a note saying you are well and will be back soon and not to worry." He took a folded paper from one pocket and handed it to the psychiatrist. "Read it, sign it, leave it on that table."

"But—but—" stammered Warren, but the Hawk cut him short.

"Sign it," Carse repeated coldly, and in his gray eyes was the look that few men could face. "And from now on be most careful not to make any sudden movements."

Warren read and signed the note. As he put it on the table there sounded a sharp rap on the great window. The Hawk wheeled.

Outside, showing blurred through the rain-splashed glass, hung a lighted rectangular doorway with the figure of a man stooping in it, while like a gray, deep-swimming shark the sides of an aircar loomed dimly all around. Carse sprang to the window and pulled it inward. Into the room jumped a peppery, freckle-faced man no taller than the Hawk himself.

"My suit, Ban—on the fire escape," the Hawk ordered, but the words seemed unnecessary, for the man was already on his way. Behind him, taking his place in the lighted doorway, appeared the stooping figure of a large and grinning black man.

"Here, Friday," the Hawk said, and pointed to the four figures on the cots. "One at a time. Careful. Don't get them wet or chilled, and don't let their arms get loose."

"Yes, suh!" was the cheerful answer.

Friday lifted the coolie and carried him like a large doll up through the window and back into the car, and a moment later he was back for another. When the last one was inside Carse turned to the unhappy Dr. Warren.

"Now, you—inside," he ordered. "Jump."

Warren went in—rather hastily, for at his heels skimmed the frightening figure of Ban Wilson in the space suit he had been sent to fetch.

Carse took a last look around, then himself stepped up, pulled the window closed from the outside, and disappeared inside the car. The car lifted straight up through the pelting rain till it was lost in the black nimbus above. An hour later it was circling over a particular spot far out at sea.

From out of the water in that spot a space ship rose till it hung clear of the highest ground swell. Ship and aircar touched for a little, then the ship rose again, at an angle, leaving the aircar suspended where it had stopped.

At six thousand feet a thin red ray appeared between the ships, and the aircar fell to the water with a crash and began slowly sinking. A few minutes later the last few feet of its snub nose slipped twisting under the surface; and at that moment the space ship with its strange cargo was already free of Earth's atmosphere and was headed toward the pinpoint of light that would grow to be red-splotched Jupiter and his brood of circling satellites.

CHAPTER III

The New Estapp

FROM both Jupiter and from the sun Satellite III gets its light, and when both are high the far side of the satellite lies in a night softened only by starlight and the pale beams of such brother planets as might in the gearing of time be off in line of sight.

Diametrically opposite III's tough Port o' Porno, at the edge of the lake called the Great Briney, lay Eliot Leithgow's secret laboratory, the space ship's destination. It was important that it arrive unobserved. It was by calculation, then, that it was night when the ship dropped rapidly out of the skies and hung momentarily over the inky surface of the lake, and it was from characteristic Hawk Carse caution that that man, clad in his space suit, there set out on a long circular sweep, leaving the ship to drop below the surface and continue as a submarine, safe out of sight of chance or curious eyes.

Many eyes would have been interested. That was a lawless frontier, the laboratory was immensely valuable, and the Hawk had many enemies among the bands of space pirates and adventurers of those outer regions. The laboratory might have been discovered and taken over. It was necessary to reconnoiter.

As swiftly as an aircar the Hawk sped across the black surface of the lake, until suddenly there was land beneath his feet. At once he rose, checked speed, and circled back and followed the shoreline, slowly dropping until he skimmed just a foot or two above the pebbles of the beach.

He soon came to a boat, half-buried in the sand, and from there he made short quartering flights across a large hilly area, listening and peering intently, face plate opened wide. At last, all seeming well, he hinged back both mittens, took a raygun from his belt, then darted to a particular gnarled oziree stump and pressed one of its many small projecting twigs.

A section of the bark slid down. He listened, heard no sound. A dart of his belt flash showed the rungs of a metal ladder rising through a hollow, metal-sided tube. He squeezed himself in, closed the entrance panel, and with careful manipulation of his gravity controls lowered until he reached the floor of a metal-walled passage twenty-five feet below.

With winks of his flash he floated along this passage for a few yards to where it made a turn. Some distance after the turn he came to a series of doors set into the metal walls on both sides. As he came to each one he listened for a moment, opened it rapidly and searched the room with his flash. There were living quarters, a galley, storerooms and small laboratories, all containing much valuable equipment that had been left behind when the place had been evacuated.

AT THE farther end he came to the radio room and one laboratory that was very large. All was silent, dingy, deserted. Across from the main laboratory lay the lake side of the hideout and the water entrance. Hovering in the corridor there, certain now that no intruder was present, he turned a light switch. The batteries responded, and through a thick round glass window he looked into an immense chamber filled with water. In one far corner stood a little aircar, an elongated silver bubble in the watery green.

The Hawk lifted from his belt the transmitting apparatus he had used in the hospital ward back on Earth.

"O. K.," he said into it. "Come."

Almost at once the space ship appeared, nosing slowly through the green water and causing low murmurs to sound through the chamber wall. There was a period of waiting until the water had been drawn out; but at last the near port of the ship opened and out stepped a frail, elderly man with mild blue eyes set in a lined face topped by an unruly shock of thin white hair. This was Eliot Leithgow. The Hawk, out of his suit now, opened the chamber door and went in to meet him.

"Everything all right?" Leithgow asked anxiously.

"Looks just as we left it," Carse answered with a faint smile, and then characteristically began taking charge. "But the air's bad; better run in and get the ventilating system working. The lights too. Run them temporarily on the lock batteries if necessary. I'll oversee the unloading."

Leithgow smiled; he was used to receiving the Hawk's orders. He disappeared through the chamber door and a moment later Ban Wilson, followed by the black Friday, grinning as usual, emerged blinking in the sudden bright light that just then flooded the room. Carse stepped past them and entered the ship. Dr. Warren stood beyond the port waiting for him.

"Are your patients all right?" asked the Hawk.

"Still good, sir," was the cheerful reply.

"You're sure they can be trusted out of their strait-jackets here?"

"Quite sure."

"Then let them out of the cabin. They will help with the unloading. But keep your eye on them for any signs of relapse. From now on your one job will be to keep them alive. I shall hold you personally responsible."

"You may, sir," this psychiatrist said to his kidnapper with a smile.

All hands set to the unloading, while Leithgow supervised the placing of the supplies and equipment and Carse bossed the whole job, and by the time Jupiter showed in the visi-screen of the radio room everything had been removed, most of the larger pieces uncrated, and the hideout set roughly in order.

THEN the Hawk sought out Leithgow, finding him in the main laboratory arranging the placement of hundreds of jars of raw elements, chemicals, and other materials of science behind a large screen. Carse's eye was

caught by a cage containing two guinea pigs.

"What are these for?" he asked Leithgow.

"What did God make poor little guinea pigs for?" was the smiling answer. "They're for the first tests."

"You're sure you can do this?" Carse shot at him suddenly.

"I did it with guinea pigs under the inventor."

"How long will the whole business take?"

"Once the apparatus is set up it will take only a minute or so for each body; it's almost instantaneous, as I've told you before. But setting up the apparatus is a complicated and exacting job. It may take a week. I have to do it all myself."

"But with all of us to help, you could do it in a day or two, couldn't you?"

"No one shall help," the elderly scientist said firmly; "I must do everything myself. I trust everyone here, even Dr. Warren, but what no one sees, no one can talk about in his sleep. I want you to have a guard outside the laboratory door at all times, Carse. And this screen goes between the door and where I work." *

"One week!" the Hawk exclaimed irritably.

Leithgow smiled affectionately and shook his head.

"Here's one time Hawk Carse has to wait," he said. "But maybe I can cut that week. I'll do my best."

"I have much to do," Carse went on, "and until this is over and you and the five are on your way back to Earth I don't dare leave you. There's one thing in particular I need very much to find out, and that is who has taken over Ku Sui's interests since his death. He was very powerful and he controlled many outlaw groups. Somebody must have fallen heir, and I have to know who he is, for that man automatically is my enemy."

"I'll do all I can," the scientist said.

"Speed, speed," the Hawk urged. "While you're at it I'll check our defenses."

He left and went to the room assigned Dr. Warren and his patients. He found them silently arranging five cots along a wall. They looked up as he entered, and there came to him the old, familiar, odd, unpleasant feeling.

The doomed men were dressed in whatever odds and ends the ship's lockers had afforded—chiefly rough brown denim shirts and trousers, with used shoes and jackets and sweaters of various colors. All kept their clothing fairly clean and tidy.

BUT there was no medical skill that could make their faces clean and tidy. Rough skinned, bloated, with unhealable lesions and the thin stream of slaver continually at the corners of their mouths, it seemed incredible that behind those faces lay the most outstanding brains of their time—Professor Estapp, the American, specialist in biochemistry, Professor Geinst, the German, preeminent in astronomy, and Sir Charles Esme Norman, the great English master of mathematics. Who can guess at the suffering of those brains? The coarse faces could but poorly reflect what they felt, and whatever it was, it remained day after day un-

* No description of the appartus used in the reembodying technique will be found in this account. Of course no one today knows what the apparatus was like; but the writer has avoided even setting down something imaginary, so as to help leave obscure a line of experiment that must ever be avoided. Fortunately for the peace of the world, the technique was stumbled upon only after "a long series of accidents and miracles" and there is so little chance of its ever being rediscovered—at least for an age or so—that we may go to sleep every night, secure in the feeling that there will never be a duplicate "I" to appear and raise hob with our lives.—Ed.

spoken—unknown to the world.

Everybody pitied these creatures, but no one could be comfortable around them, Carse, chief latter-day author of their being, least of all. Never very tactful, in their presence he always seemed to get worse. He turned now to Dr. Warren.

"What is your real attitude toward all this?" he asked abruptly.

The psychiatrist knew what he meant.

"Personally I approve," he said. "Officially I do not, and I will do nothing except look after my men."

"That's all I expect of you," the Hawk said. "Watch them. They must not take their lives till they're replaced. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Carse turned and looked at the four.

"No welching," he said.

Odd looks came into their eyes. The lips of the coolie twisted.

"No welching," that man repeated thickly.

The Hawk turned and left.

Five days afterwards Master Scientist Eliot Leithgow opened the side door of the main laboratory, stepped into the radio room adjoining, and presented to the entire party, expectantly assembled there, a tall, fine, clean cut, young new body covered only by a smock.

At sight of his face the ugly body containing the brain of Estapp, the American biochemist, fell to the floor in a faint.

CHAPTER IV

Four More New Men

THERE were cries and movements of confusion. Carse pushed to the fallen man's side.

"Easy now!" he cried. "Friday, carry him back to his cot. Warren, attend him."

A goggle-eyed Friday lifted the unconscious man and carried him out, Warren following anxiously. The new body looked around with an expression that alternated between contempt and bewilderment.

"Don't be upset, boy," Leithgow said to him reassuringly. "He only fainted. We are all your friends here, and you'll soon have proof of what I've been telling you."

The new Estapp pulled away from Leithgow and stepped forward. Pointing, and appealing to the others, he said:

"This man who looks like Master Scientist Eliot Leithgow has just been telling me a most fantastic story. I listened, and of course I don't believe a word of it; but something's happened, and for heaven's sake tell me what! It's some practical joke, or—or have I gone crazy? I was just now making a voice recording—I'm sure I was—it seems so clear. But—wasn't I? Did I faint? I must have, or how did I get here? Where am I, and who are you? If this is a joke it's a very stupid one!"

Leithgow kept shaking his head.

"Please, now, Estapp," he pleaded. "Don't. Try and keep control of yourself. You'll see that all I've said is true."

The new young man looked at him with contempt.

"It's a damn poor joke!" he cried. "I must ask you to give me my clothes and let me out of here. I want to go back to the hotel. My wife is waiting for me, and she's ill and nervous, and it's important that I get back to her."

Hawk Carse stepped before the young man.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.

"No, certainly not," was the immediate answer.

"I hoped you might. My name is Carse; they call me Hawk Carse. There are people on Earth who have heard of me."

"I've told him about you," Leithgow interrupted.

"It happens that I rarely lie," Carse went on coldly. "Now I tell you that this man *is* Master Scientist Eliot Leithgow, and that what he has just told you is the truth. You haven't just fainted, and at this moment you're on Jupiter's Satellite III, 483,000,000 miles from Earth."

"I don't believe you," Estapp said flatly.

The Hawk's eyes grew frosty.

"Do you know how to work a visi-screen?" he asked. He pointed across the room.

WITHOUT a word the new young man went to the apparatus, the members of the group making way. Under his efficient fingers the image of a planet appeared in one corner of the main screen, then jumped to the center and grew suddenly into the great blood-splotched orb of Jupiter. His face paled. He switched off the current.

"This would be the simplest of tricks," he said contemptuously. "Let me see the body which you say contains my brain."

"He was the man who just fainted," Leithgow said. "Come with me. Perhaps he's all right now."

The white-haired scientist took the new young man by the arm and conducted him to the patients' room, and all the others of the group followed.

The ugly body with the brain of Estapp was lying in one of the cots, conscious now, and Dr. Warren was sitting on the cot adjoining, speaking quietly to him. At sight of the new Estapp he made a move to get up, but Warren restrained this. The young man placed himself at the foot of the cot.

"They have been telling me some wonderful tales," he began at once. "They say, among other things, that I, this body, this me who stands before you, was created out of chemicals just now from a voice recording made by myself just now—or rather four years ago—at the Congress in New York City. They say that my real body, the one that made the recording, was kidnaped by Dr. Ku Sui, and that he removed the brain from it, and that brain now lies in your head. Is this so?"

The man on the cot never took his eyes off those of the other. His coarse lips moved.

"Yes," they said.

"It should be easy to prove that you don't lie. What is my pet name for my wife?" The young man asked.

As if wrenched from a dead man came the answer.

"I called her Kitty."

"All right. Once, only once, I called her something else in jest. She didn't like it. What was that?"

The creature on the cot drew in his breath sharply.

"Catty," he managed to say.

The new Estapp's mouth opened, but his surprise was brief.

"This could be telepathy," he said to the group. He thought a moment, then addressed the other again. "Tell me some intimate memory not now present in my consciousness," he demanded. "Something no one else knows."

Tears were flooding the eyes in the ugly face on the bed.

"Please don't do this to me!" he cried, writhing.

AT THIS, for the first time, the young man softened a little. Gently now,

but still inexorably, he insisted:

"Tell me something. One thing."

The body with the original brain of Estapp sprang suddenly out of the cot and backed anguished to the wall. He covered his face with his hands.

"Can't you?" asked the new Estapp, again skeptical.

"Yes!" the other cried out suddenly as if at bay. "It was at Christmas, and I was a little boy. I touched a sparkling red ornament on our tree, and it fell and broke, and I was scared and never told anyone."

The new Estapp backed a step, then like the other covered his face with his hands. He was shattered. But suddenly he removed his hands and faced old Leithgow, and now all saw that his eyes were brimmed with tears.

"My wife!" he cried, "—you say it's been four years. Is—is she all right? She's still—still . . . ?" He could not finish the question.

The Master Scientist smiled comfortingly.

"She is still your wife," he said gently. "She will be all right when you have returned to her again."

Only Dr. Warren saw the tears which at that moment ran down the hands which covered the ugly man's tortured face.

"Go away, all of you," the psychiatrist cried then. "Dr. Leithgow, please take care of your man. Estapp—my Estapp—wants to be alone."

"Come," said Leithgow to the new young man. "I'll take you to my room."

Again there was a look of bewilderment on the young chap's fine strong face.

"I—I—it's all so mixed up!" he said. "I'm not going crazy, do you think?"

"Sh-h," whispered the old scientist, leading him out. "This must be a terrible shock. I'll give you a sedative and you'll sleep."

So ended this strange scene. Ban and Friday returned to the radio room, the one unwontedly subdued, the other still a little scared of the new man. The coolie and remaining two unfortunates found an unoccupied room and stayed there together, saying nothing. No man can say what thoughts lay in their soon-to-be-superseded brains. As for Carse, he disappeared, and revealed what his reaction was when he stopped Leithgow at the door of the laboratory a few minutes later.

"Don't let that happen again," he ordered irritably. "I can't stand such things."

"There are four more," his old friend reminded him.

"Put them in a cubby, tie them, gas them, anything—but keep them together so that they can get oriented together, all at the same time. And give me warning so I can get away."

An understanding smile lighted the scientist's lined face.

"Leave it to me, then, Carse," he said gently. "You have about fifteen minutes."

THE Hawk's features relaxed a little.

You're all right, Eliot," he said—which was high praise—then turned and left, and was not seen again for some time.

A quarter of an hour later Leithgow came out of the laboratory again, and this time there were four startled and angry and incredulous new men with him. He put them with Dr. Warren and the Estapp body in the patients' room, then rounded up Friday and Ban Wilson and the new Estapp—who was half asleep — a n d the three other doomed men and drove them into the room, too. There they all stayed for nearly two hours—and at the end of that time sedatives and Leithgow's pa-

tience and the presentation of much evidence combined to break down the anger and disbelief of the four, and left them by turns dazed and excited but convinced. And their statements that they felt well—except for headaches—was supported by an examination which Dr. Warren gave each one.

The four doomed bodies were left in their room, and Leithgow put the five new arrivals by themselves in another for the time being. When Carse showed up he for once asked no questions about what had happened; but Leithgow volunteered the information.

"How soon may we have the suicides?" Carse asked when he had finished.

The scientist shrugged his shoulders. He said:

"All five seem well, but it would be only prudent to wait a little. A week, perhaps? Maybe even two?"

"Two days," said the Hawk curtly and walked away.

CHAPTER V

The Suicides

IT HAS often been said that Hawk Carse never showed fear in his life, and whether this dubious compliment accorded with the facts this writer does not know; but the accounts all agree that during the forty-eight hours which followed he found many occasions to absent himself from his friends, and never once was he seen in the presence of the doomed ones.

This man called fearless who so often had braved death with cold eyes and a smoking raygun, who had sought out and faced even that deadliest of insidious killers, Ku Sui—this man of flawless physical courage yet seemed unable to face the four unfortunates who by his own act had been reincarnated and who now by his own will were to be forced to take their lives. This may have been fear; but perhaps the judgment should lie with the psychoanalysts. Ban and big-hearted Friday too avoided the silent, ugly, doomed ones, and only Dr. Warren and old Eliot Leithgow ministered to them.

Many times during that death-watch the white-haired scientist went in to give a mite of comfort, and each time he found the doomed men silent, sunk in bottomless reverie. There is some doubt about the degree to which their coarse features could reflect what was passing in their marvelous minds, but there can be none that their thoughts were often bitter.

No consciousness in all time had been racked by a fate like theirs, twisted by like irony. Happy and fruitful, at the peak of life's rich possible, their brains had been marked by the green tiger eyes of Ku Sui—kidnapped—snatched and laid naked in pans—forced by their own bodies' murderer to perform the calculations which were to make him master over men and worlds. Then had come Hawk Carse—hope—the hurried transplantation to b o d i e s — Earth's great gape of amazement and curiosity—and the tragedy of the wives and loved ones and everyone's inability to adjust. This was unparalleled, but now—worst thing—they had to see other men, men with whom they felt no normal bond, men identical with themselves as they were just a few years before—step casually into their own once happy places in life—themselves to be suicides and lie forever a little unmarked tangle of bones far out in the deeps of space.

KIND Leithgow tried to tell them that they would continue to live in the bodies of the new men; but this

would not have fooled these brains when they heard the voice of their first teacher. It was they, they who had lived all the past years, grown, experienced, and the death so close would be their own death, their personal death, their only death. If identical copies of themselves as they once were, were to assume perfectly their old places in life, fooling everyone, including themselves, into unchallenged acceptance — these men were still impostors and totally without psychic connection with the first, original, authentic consciousnesses.

The coolie body put something of this into words on the morning of their death, half an hour before the time set. It may seem strange, but nothing till then had been said about the manner of the suicides, and it was chiefly to ask their preference that Leithgow went in to them at that time. All were up and dressed, and all were sitting at the heads of their cots, backs against the wall, except Estapp, who was pacing slowly up and down. They were still showing the tendency to be dominated by the brain of Cram, Estapp a little less than the others. As usual none was speaking. Geinst was smoking a cigarro, but he was so lost in his thoughts that he kept resting the lighted end on the spun glass bed cover, which kept putting it out.

"There is half an hour, gentlemen," Leithgow informed them quietly, looking down at the floor. "If I can be of any last service, please tell me."

The slanted eyes of the coolie lifted and held on this luckier of the only two Master Scientists of that decade. Time was when their two brains had worked and fired together. The yellow face smiled faintly. The awkward lips said:

"Do you think any man, now, can be of service to me?"

Leithgow had no answer. The coolie went on:

"I am to go, and it is all wrong and unjust; but after I am gone, then it will somehow be right. Already there is a new man who feels himself to be the essential Cram, his ego, his 'I.' I think he fools himself; he is a ghost who will live on as an impostor when the real Cram 'I' is annihilated. But I may be mistaken.

"Oh, the 'I'!" mused the yellow man. "Tough old problem! What is it? I remember as a boy coming up sharp one day with the thought: I am the center of the whole world. Everywhere I go I am the center of all I see, all I experience. I am different from everybody else because I am I. I am most immensely important.

"Later I reasoned that my feeling of 'I' was not a unique thing. Other people had it too. But where did all these 'I's come from? And if I had not been born, where would my 'I' be at that moment? Were 'I's' interchangeable? Indestructible? Were they all drops of the one thing? Could my own 'I' exist in some other body?

"Look what has happened to me, Eliot. What, please, is the exact relation between consciousness and unconsciousness, between continuance and annihilation?"

HE SMILED faintly, then added: "Of course I have oversimplified the problem. When I found my 'I' in this body it at once began to lose some of its integrity. And then there is an interlocking of my 'I' with those of my friends here. . . .

"Well, Eliot, these problems may yet be clarified," he concluded, still with the faint smile. "It may take only half an hour."

The coolie stopped speaking and his brown eyes half closed. Leithgow's lips were twitching. He bit them, blinked hard, and looked away.

"In what manner do you wish it to be?" he asked.

Estapp had stopped pacing and was listening like the others, and at this question all four sought each other's faces. The coolie gave the answer.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "Except that it be in the open air, under the sun, if that is possible."

"It shall be so," blurted old Leithgow, and with the words he hurried from the room, emotion claiming him at last.

At the time set, Leithgow appeared again at the door of the patients' room and stood there, head lowered. The four rose at once and he led them out along the passage which led to the concealed entrance in the ozi-tree stump. Behind walked Dr. Warren, prepared to render assistance if it were needed. Behind him followed the four new identicals and one other, that of the suicide Swanson, all looking white and strained, and then came Ban Wilson, quiet and subdued, and Friday, whose face was an unhealthy lavender. Well in back of all followed the Hawk, grimly.

Silently, one by one, they climbed the ladder and were out in the light of Jupiter and the sun. Never more than in that moment did the men who were to return see a morning which struck their hearts with more poignant freshness. As they walked, the doomed men looked at the great red blighted planet with avid, startled eyes. It was the first time they had been out under that glorious sight, and was so soon to be their last.

Their way led to a nearby hill, the highest in the surrounding jungle. Through riotous green vegetation and tangled creepers, past clumps of exotic fern trees, Leithgow led them, straight up to the top of the hill. Out over the horizon in one direction he pointed.

"Earth is out there," he said, and all the men looked off into the blue sky in the direction he pointed. Earth could not be seen, but they looked as if they never would have done, and when their eyes dropped to the lush verdure around them their eyes were brimming with tears.

THEY hardly saw who it was when Hawk Carse passed in front of them and placed a little pellet in each one's hand.

"It will not hurt," Carse said between tight lips.

Leithgow stepped forward, but the coolie shook his head.

"No farewells, please," he said quietly.

Haltingly Leithgow asked:

"Is there any message?"

"Words are so weak when life hath been so strong," the yellow man murmured.

For a moment more the four stood quietly looking at each other while unspoken intelligences flew among them, then as one man they lifted each his pellet to his lips. One after the other, then, they slipped down to lie on the ground. And so they died, in less than a minute, eyes turned to where, unseen in the blue sky, the Earth that had borne them went spinning her eternal uncaring way.

Tears fell unheeded to the flowers at old Eliot's feet. These four bodies and brains—how strangely his life had been bound up with them! How close had his own brain come to joining theirs in the glowing liquid of Ku Sui's dreadful case! That was only a few months ago; and it was just a little afterwards that three of these bodies, bestial and isuan-ravaged, had been torn from the nearby jungle, perhaps from that very spot, by a Hawk Carse desperate in his need for living vessels to put the dying brains in. And the coolie body—

what degradation had it not known as, altered in brain, it ran to serve the evil Eurasian's will.

Sharply, Carse's voice cut through these thoughts.

"Friday."

The Negro was prepared for what to do. From the base of a lone tree nearby he picked up a portable raygun, and on the highest point of the hill he melted a wide shallow grave. Ban helped him lay the bodies in. Then again he took the ray.

The five new men looked ill. No one wanted to go close.

Friday turned on the ray, swept it from side to side a number of times, and then from the tree he brought a shovel. He did not have to use it long.

All the living started back to the laboratory. And then calamity struck.

CHAPTER VI

The Hidden Word

CARSE, well in the lead, was almost at the ozi stump when he heard a weird cry, and wheeling to a crouch, raygun already in hand, he saw the new body of Estapp fall to the ground, writhing in convulsions!

Rapidly the adventurer scanned the neighborhood. He had heard no shot, and no enemy was to be seen. Had Estapp been stricken from within?

He did not know, and remained just as he was, searching every bush and tree. Then without warning a second new man, the tall Sir Charles, fell and lay writhing like the other. Carse sheathed his gun.

"Inside with them!" he cried, and ran to the nearest body, Estapp. Ban reached him at the same time and together they carried the stricken man back and down through the ozi stump to the former patients' room. As they placed him on a cot his movements ceased, and a moment later he slowly relaxed all over. His heart gave no sound. He was dead.

Sir Charles was dead, too, when Friday placed him on the cot adjoining.

Carse rushed out into the corridor and almost stumbled over the body of a third new man—Geinst. He died in the adventurer's arms as he was carrying him through the door.

In frantic haste then all three rushed back up the passage to the entrance. At the foot of the ladder they found Dr. Warren with the body of Swanson, and this new man was dying. Leaving the others to carry him back, Carse flew up the ladder. Just outside, on his back in the warm Jupiter and sun light, lay the body of the fifth and last of their new men, the leonine-headed genius Cram. It was faintly twitching, but even as Carse bent over the movements ceased, and he had joined the others.

The sharp shock nearly struck old Leithgow dead where he stood. Feebly, ash-white, he sank to the ground, and there rested himself on one elbow by the side of the lifeless Cram. In a moment the danger was over, however; color flushed back into his lined face, and his eyes opened to find the Hawk bending close.

"The others?" Leithgow asked in a whisper.

"All dead."

"All dead," the old man murmured brokenly. "All dead. All. Everything."

"Why?" whispered the Hawk.

"I don't know," was the weak answer.

"Are you sure it was the right recorder I brought you?"

"Yes. It was the one I was told was the right one; the number corresponded with the ones on the strips."

THE head of Friday appeared in the stump. Incisively Carse ordered:

"Take this body and put it with the others, and tell Warren to find the cause of these deaths. You, Eliot," he went on more gently, "come with me. Take it easy, but let's lose no time. We've got to have a look at that recorder."

He helped Leithgow to his feet and together they went back down to the laboratory. Carse entered, passing the screen for the first time since the reembodying apparatus had been assembled there, and sought at once the part he had burgled on Earth in the storm. The scientist, strong again now, disconnected it and examined it closely.

The recorder was of standard type and fine quality, and all the parts visible looked sound and proper. The transmitter element lay sealed in an opaque plastic box about the size of a carton of cigarros, however, and could not be seen. Could the trouble be in there?

There seemed to be only three possibilities. One was that all five men had died from some external cause not connected with their artificial creation. This was highly improbable, but Dr. Warren would soon report on that. A second was that Leithgow's technique had been defective; but he insisted it had not, pointing, as justification, to the fact that the men had been created living, and for two days had continued to live. The most probable thing was that either a flaw had developed in the transmitter element or that their recorder was not the original one used. There was nothing they could do if they had the wrong one, but it might be possible to discover whether there was any flaw in the one they had.

If there was a flaw, they thought it must be in the transmitter. But being sealed, how were they to examine its inside? They dare not risk damaging its performance characteristics, for the recorder might be the right one, and the transmitter undamaged.

As they considered Dr. Warren appeared in the side of the door; but he did not take the liberty of coming in.

"I've examined all five bodies," he announced. "There's no external sign of how they came to die."

"Perform autopsies," clipped the Hawk. "Open every one. Don't spare them. They're only scientific experiments—failures."

"Yes, sir."

The psychiatrist turned to go.

"Wait," Carse called out. He went to the guinea pigs in their cage on a nearby table. Two had been brought from Earth. Four were in their now—two of them lying on their sides, dead. He slipped out the bottom of the cage, removed the dead new animals, and took them to Dr. Warren. "Two other experiments," he said.

The doctor left, and Carse found Leithgow mounting the transmitting element in one of his pieces of laboratory equipment.

"X-ray," Leithgow said under his breath.

CARSE nodded, and waited. The scientist pressed a button, and there was a brief buzz while the x-rays did their work. He took a score of shots in a number of positions and then slipped into the dark room and developed the strip of film. Hardly dry, he put it in the viewer, then both men studied the radiographs closely.

Leithgow was the expert here, and it was he who pointed out a thin line made by what seemed a curly wire that showed faintly in several shots. It was peculiar in that the ends were not connected with anything they could see.

"That's odd," said Leithgow, rub-

bing his cheek reflectively. "I can't imagine any possible function for such a wire. There is none. Definitely there is none. This is only a standard element, and that has nothing to do with its operation."

He took more shots, but got nothing which showed it much more clearly. He went back to the element itself and studied it carefully with reference to the radiographs.

"I think we may safely operate on this," he said finally. "I'll drill a hole here and use a Kroll extractor, used in brain operations. Just pull it out, since it's not connected, and have a look."

He drilled the hole with the skill of a surgeon. When he viewed the interior through an inserted microlamp his mouth dropped open.

"Goodness gracious," he said, and inserted the extractor.

That instrument brought out a small folded piece of paper. With trembling fingers he opened it, and found on the inside a single word written in pencil. It was this word which by the curves of its letters had misled them into thinking it a wire. He handed the paper to Carse. The word was unmistakable. It was "Weep."

"What does it mean?" wondered Leithgow.

The Hawk's eyes narrowed. He said:

"I think it means that someone else got the original recorder and left ours, just like it, in its place. A mocker. " 'Weep,' he tells us—after all our trouble and all your heartaches with those men."

Suddenly he lifted the paper to his nose and smelled. As he did so his gray eyes turned cold as the ice caps of Mars. Silently he handed the paper back to Leithgow.

He smelled it too, and his face turned ashen.

"Ku Sui," he breathed. "Tsin-tsin flowers from the planet Venus. His perfume."

"Ku Sui is alive," whispered the Hawk. "And he has told us so."

CHAPTER VII

"Always Attack"

KU SUI alive!

For a moment the two men looked at each other, wordless. The thought was staggering. For years up and down the solar system the Hawk had feuded with the slippery Eurasian, and more than once he had succeeded in clutching him tight, only to have him with luck or brilliant resource slip out of his very hands; but that last time, surely he could not have escaped.

He found a single word

He had pursued him into his asteroid at the moment it was plunging into Earth's atmosphere and heating to incandescence. He had followed him deep under its surface, seen him there, close ahead, and then barely got clear himself before it plunged a streak of

flame into the Atlantic; and sharp eyes, watching every second from the space ship near by, had seen only himself come out of that fiery trap. How could the man fail to have perished!

But here, now, was this paper and this mocking word. Here was the perfume used by Ku Sui, and by no other Earthman of whom they had ever heard. Here was their recorder, a substitute -but not to be discovered to be one till their attempt had proved a failure and the paper with word and perfume found. What could be more characteristic of the Eurasian!

"It's Ku Sui," the Hawk said slowly. "It's Ku Sui. He lives, and he hasn't changed. He will still be dominated by his lust for power. His Coordinated Brains were his chief weapon, so it is certain he would want another set. Now, what if he found out about this new re-embodying technique? Don't ask me how he could; he has powerful contacts and tremendous skill and ingenuity; for all I know he may have tapped your memory while you slept. But suppose he did find out—would he not see at once that here lay a chance to get his Coordinated Brains back? Five other ones, exactly the same as the first, taken from new bodies made by himself?

"He is a brain specialist and we know his brilliance—so might we not expect him to anticipate the failure to adjust after the forced transplantations, and deduce that we, ourselves, would likely want to make five new persons to wipe out our obligations under my old promise? He might even have exposed us to the suggestion, somehow.

"It would be characteristic, and he is quite capable of it. All he had to do was obtain the original films and recorder himself, first, and leave copies of them in their places. His copies were good ones for the men lived two days; but only the originals can produce men who will live out their lives. And he has the originals. He is clearly going to make that set of five men, then take their brains; and he may even have done it already. And there is a high probability that he will want your brain to add to the five, as he did before."

"MERCIFUL heavens!" whispered the scientist. He sat on a stool by the table and cupped his head in both hands. "*That* again, on top of everything else. Deeper and deeper into trouble.

"It's so complete it's almost funny," the old man went on trying to smile but hardly succeeding. "Once more we're fugitives from Earth, and this time we're several ways guilty. I had expected to square everything by returning with five new bodies, but now that's not even a hope. We have lost the four unfortunates we brought with us, and on Earth they would call us murderers. Our obligation to those men and their wives—that is unfulfilled and can't be fulfilled, for we don't have the right apparatus. The evil Ku Sui still lives. He has the right apparatus, and will be using it to make another set of Brains. As you say, he will probably want mine. And we don't even know where he is! Carse, friend, my life falls to pieces!"

The Hawk could not look at the old man for a moment. Tight-lipped, head still averted, he said gently:

"You forgot one more thing, Eliot. Ku Sui now knows where the laboratory is. He saw when he came to do the transplantations—remember?"

This was extremely serious, but Leithgow, surprisingly, reacted by taking away his hands and smiling a little.

"Well, that news is not a straw—and I suppose I'm not a camel," he said

bravely. "I'll still keep my brain in my body for a little while, I guess. Carse, I'm in your hands. What shall we do? Give me some of your crisp orders."

The Hawk's eyes were ice and he did not smile. He asked:

"Do you think Ku Sui with the right apparatus could discover for himself the right technique?"

"No one in the whole solar system could," Leithgow answered. "The inventor discovered it by a long series of accidents and miracles. But that Eurasian—I tell you I sometimes think nothing is impossible to him."

"Well," Carse said d e c i s i v e l y, "there's only one thing to do. I've got to find Ku Sui and get the originals, and if possible I must do it before he's able to make them work. There's no telling where the hunt will lead me. That means you'll be left here in the laboratory—and while I'm gone he may come and attack."

The Hawk considered.

"Perhaps I can take the most important equipment and hide somewhere else," suggested the old scientist.

"Where will you go? There's only Ban Wilson's place on this satellite, and he has no strong defense. Port o' Porno is more dangerous than a cave of wild beasts.

"NO," he decided. "You stay here. This is the best place. The defenses are very strong. I'll be here as much as I can. Ku Sui will eventually come. He'll not only want your brain, but want to take over the place. It would be tremendously valuable to him. No, you stay here. You'll have Ban and Friday and the doctor; and if he comes when I'm away you'll be ready for him."

"What will you do first?" asked Leithgow.

"Attack," answered the Hawk. "Always attack. The first objective is close by. You remember I said I was curious about who had taken over Ku Sui's interests? One of his agents was the Venusian Lars Tantril, who probably died when I attacked the asteroid. He was overseer of a very strong ranch right here on III; it was the one I raided that time. There's a possibility that Ku Sui, now that he has lost his asteroid with its laboratories, will be making that ranch his headquarters; but more than that, there's a high probability that the present overseer of the ranch knows where he is, or how to get in touch with him.

"I think I'll raid that ranch again," the Hawk said coolly, thinking aloud. "I won't be gone long—with luck. You'll be safe, for our defenses are very strong. You've had no chance to see it, but Ban and Friday are very good men. Ku Sui will probably be too busy, anyway, to attack us right away."

For a moment more Carse stood thinking, his right hand stroking his flaxen bangs in his characteristic gesture.

"Yes!" he said then, and the note of final decision was in his voice. "I must find Ku Sui and get his recorder; only that will save us. And first I must raid that ranch. It'll be good to be doing something definite again! This hanging around has been killing me!"

At once he left the room, to skim back in a few minutes in his self-propulsive suit.

"That?" said Leithgow in surprise. "wouldn't the aircar be better?"

"Too conspicuous," said the Hawk. "Eliot, explain everything to Ban and Friday. Have them dispose of the five bodies. Keep a tight alert. Be sure and keep a tight alert! Expect me when you see me."

Leithgow put out his hand, and

Carse, unable to grasp it in his big mitten, let it rest for a moment on the outside.

"Good-by, Carse," the old man said with emotion. "Be careful. Please be careful."

"Tell me to have my usual luck," said the adventurer smiling very faintly. "Luck to you, Eliot."

He surveyed the territory

He snapped shut his face plate, turned, and skimmed through the door. A moment later he was scanning the surrounding country from within the ozi's stump, and then he was out, slipping between the low trees over the tangle of vegetation in the direction he knew.

The Hawk was on the trail.

CHAPTER VIII

Swoop of the Hawk

JUPITER was close to zenith and his light now lay bright over the nearby reaches of jungle and swamp. The light was a danger, so at first Carse threaded cautiously through the high bushes and trees, keeping as low as he could to escape the eyes of possible hidden lookouts or chance observers.

After a few miles he rode higher and continued among the crowns of the taller trees, where he could make better speed. Still farther on he angled far above the jungle to get a comprehensive view. He wanted to find a particular river, which he knew emptied into the Great Briney just beyond the ranch he was seeking. He might have followed the edge of the lake, but the river approach was just as quick, and in daylight was much safer.

Before long he saw it, far in the distance, a yellow serpent coiling its way through a brilliant green mat. He descended to it in a long angle and continued in a swift, never hesitating sweep a few feet over its surface. This way was an undulant natural canyon, floored by muddy waters and high-banked with glossy, flower-spotted green.

Hours passed. Jupiter passed his zenith and kept lowering. Late in the afternoon pestiferous insects beset him, clouding his face plate with their life juice when they met him head on at his high speed. Occasional curious birds pecked him curiously, and several times a red leather-winged species attacked venomously. They were annoying, but could do him no harm. Once, however, they brought him to the edge of great danger.

He was skimming low and fighting off a vicious and particularly persistent flock of these birds, when suddenly he caught sight of what looked like an uprooted tree, bare of leaves, which lay in the water right in his path. He lifted as sharply as he could, and would have passed over it by several feet if it had really been a tree; but in the last second he saw through the flurry of red wings that the tree itself lifted upward, interposing itself in the path he must take. This was the rare aquatic form

of the carnivorous lemak! Too late to avoid it, its strong stubby end branches caught at his suit and coiled about his legs, and in a continuation of his momentum he went plunging beneath the surface of the river.

His raygun came to his hand under water and as he came out it was spitting orange.* He saw a mouth gape crookedly in the gnarled mass that was the trunk of the seeming tree, and his shots burned straight into that mouth. Through a brief horrible convulsion the animal held him, tossed him from side to side, but then the limbs slackened their hold and he was free.

QUITE late in the afternoon he came to a bend and saw a high beacon and three lower watch-towers lifting nude and incongruous above the treetops well off to one side. These marked the ranch. He struck low through the jungle in their direction, and with elaborate caution worked his way to a position behind the trunk of a thick tree not far from them at the edge of a large clearing. Slowly he raised himself up through its crown, and there, in a crotch in the branches, settled himself for a close examination of the grounds.

The place looked much as it had the last time he was there. Four long, low buildings lay in a broken square about a fifth, all far back within a large area burned bare of vegetation. Close to the central building rose the hundred-foot tower of the watch beacon, and far out from it, at equal intervals, stood the steel framework of the three watch-towers, each topped by a transparent enclosure—new to him—in which stood the figure of a Venusian guard with two raygun holsters. Near one of the towers rested a space ship, and by its side the similar miniature shape of an aircar.

Perhaps fifty yards outward from the buildings circled a twenty-foot fence, steel-barbed and electrified, and for another twenty yards beyond this the ground continued clear, so that marauders and the dangerous animals of the jungle could not approach the fence without being observed by the watchers in the towers. Set into the ground just within the fence but not visible in the gathering dusk, would be a tight girdle of projecting nozzles—ready at the turn of a wheel to ring the ranch in a deadly curtain of spitting orange rays.

All this was familiar, but the Hawk's eyes narrowed with concern. Not one person could be seen on the grounds, and the guards—at least the nearest one—seemed unusually alert. Had a trap been prepared? Were the men of the ranch lying in wait, expecting him? Ku Sui by that word and perfume had as much as told him he was alive. He might have done this to lead him to attempt just what he was now about. It would be characteristic of the workings of his subtle, brilliant mind.

The space ship was evidence that someone important was at the ranch, and the aircar meant that the men were about somewhere.

IT HAD been that way the night of his previous raid. Then he had knocked the guards from their watch-towers in one fast three-cornered sweep. Dared he repeat the maneuver? It would probably be just what they would like. They would have guarded against that weak spot in their defense.

As he sat thinking Jupiter slipped below the unseen horizon and half night fell. The watch-beacon came to life, winked once, then held steady. A little

* It should be remembered that this account presents the background of a hundred years ago when the small hand raygun did not carry the energy to maintain a sustained ray, and so had to be used only in very brief individual shots.—Ed.

The strong and stubby branches coiled about him

later the sun too dipped out of sight, and the beacon leaped to brilliance, casting a round level floor of light far out over the treetops of the surrounding jungle, and by reflection lighting dimly the ranch just below. Light pierced from the rows of windows in two of the buildings, while the window-ports in the metal walls of the central building suddenly were round glowing eyes.

The eyes held Carse. It was in that building that the overseer of the ranch had his quarters. But how could he reach it? On its roof were long-range projectors, and in each watchtower was a knob which would sound in the build-

ings a clanging alarm. Very close was the unseen ring of ray nozzles. The last time he had reached the building—but had been caught.

He watched. He waited, calculating distances, velocities, strengths, reaction times, Venusian psychology, maneuvers. Behind him the jungle woke to its fierce nocturnal strife. In his tight suit he could not hear the chatterings and the crashings and the howls in the underbrush as life fought with life, but inches from his eyes monstrous insect shapes crawled across his face plate, and recurrently he felt faint vibrations as something thumped sharply on parts of his suit. Once, one of the devilish batlike kreeks fluttered raggedly about him, eyes glowing like green coals; but through everything he waited patiently and continued to form tentative plans.

As it turned out, his plan was born suddenly and hot. Half an hour after full nightfall six men left one of the lighted outer buildings and proceeded in a disorderly group to the small aircar, and a moment later two other men left the central building and joined them. All eight got in, and the car began to rise.

Instantly Carse freed himself and backed away from his perch. There was a high probability that the men were going to Port o' Porno, III's hell-roaring space port, to carouse through the evening among the entertainments and unmentionable diversions there so liberally and openly provided. But wherever they went, it might be possible to go along, their unbidden and unknown guest.

WELL back, in an open place among the treetops, the Hawk came to a stop, and hovering there, every nerve ready, he watched to see what direction the car would take. He would have to act with extreme speed if he hoped to catch it—and keep low, out of the light of the beacon. The car turned as it lifted until its nose was pointing well off to his right; then it began to move forward and slightly upward. Toward Porno! Arcing his direction rod he turned in the same direction, then holding his breath he threw the mitten control well over.

He fairly leaped into motion, and unable to swerve enough crashed through the side of a treetop thirty feet ahead - then another, and another, and another. To one side of him lances of orange sped by as one of the tower guards shot in the direction of the disturbance—but he didn't even know it in the wild confusion as he went tearing, twisting, swerving through the treetops in that first all-out dash to get fast away. Only after two miles of this wild transit could he risk rising above the trees, and when he did he looked at once for the car.

Its stern lights were two red pinpoints about half a mile above him and another half-mile ahead—and it would be accelerating! Not at all sure that he could overtake it, he pushed simultaneously on direction rod and mitten control—and consciousness for a second left him as like a shell from a gun he shot upward and ahead.

Minutes passed. The acceleration crushed the Hawk back in his suit, sickened him, but he doggedly endured it. Further and further the dark mat of the jungle fell away beneath, but little by little it seemed that the red lights grew larger. It was so! Soon the car itself became visible, a faint ghost lighted by the distant stars.

In the stratosphere he saw it better. Both still accelerating, he came within fifty yards, twenty. At five he could see clearly his immediate goal—the short projecting bar on which the stern of the car rested when on the ground. Very carefully he worked his controls.

A little later the bar lay hooked under his arm, and he was an outside passenger.

Like the pilot fish on the belly of a shark Carse rode through the midnight stratosphere of that distant planet, and he did not let go and fall away until low in the distance appeared the irregular strings and clusters of lights that marked the raw Port o' Porno.

He was waiting, hidden behind a bush and very close, when the aircar gently touched ground at the edge of the local parking area, and unseen there in the darkness he studied one by one the faces of the men who stepped out. They were Venusians—short wirey men with narrow heads covered by a stubble of spikey hair. Each bore strapped to his side a skewer knife, the planet's preferred weapon. Seven of these men got out and formed a boisterous group a dozen yards away, and not one did he recognize. But the eighth and last was Esret, chief aide to the dead Tantril, and now possibly himself the overseer.

That man he wanted!

CARSE had intended to steal the aircar and use it to get him unchallenged through the defenses of the ranch, but now his job was changed. He had to get this man to tell him where Ku Sui was, or at least how he could be contacted—and that meant, first, picking him up, and then going to work on him. The man was known to be tough.

Instantly he decided what to do. Esret was halfway to the waiting group when the Hawk struck—struck him literally in one quick horizontal sweep which knocked him unconscious before he knew he was in danger. Just in time Carse caught him around the middle with one arm, and then he was away, rising a little and swerving toward the Street of the Sailors which led into the heart of the port.

No one in the group saw the collision, but the sound of it brought them spinning around, to stare dumbstruck at the bloated aerial figure that was skimming off through the night with a limp figure hanging over one arm. One moment they stood thus, then shouting furiously in their Venusian dialect they started toward the town in hot pursuit.

Well ahead and out of sight the Hawk circled, and a minute later he was back at the aircar. Rapidly he got out of his suit, stowed it inside, bound the wrists and ankles of the still unconscious man with some short lengths of tarro cord, and jumped into the pilot's seat. The car was far off in the stratosphere when one of the Venusians, returning, found that it was gone.

Four hours later, just before dawn, Carse set down in the jungle not far from the laboratory. There he again donned his suit, picked up a gagged, blindfolded and very angry Esret, flew with him to the ozi-tree stump, and with some trouble got him down and laid him at the foot of the ladder.

He had been very tired, but when he had done this he showed a striking return of energy. Raygun in hand he skimmed rapidly to the main laboratory, calling out again and again and hurriedly glancing in most of the rooms; but no one came to meet him. He swept out to the locks. The chamber was dry, and both the space ship and aircar were there—but of Leithgow, Wilson, Friday and Dr. Warren nowhere was there a trace.

He had left the plainest warning that the laboratory was in danger and every one must be on the alert, and now, less than a day later, he had come back, found the place unguarded, and everyone gone.

Had Ku Sui been there? If so, why were there no signs of a fight? If Ku Sui had taken the others, why wasn't he

there waiting to take him, too?

CHAPTER IX

"Fun" with Esret

HE ACTED vigorously and promptly, fatigue forgotten. First he slipped out of his suit, then ran to the radio room and threw two switches, closing heavy steel doors on the inside of the land entrance and the outside of the water chamber. This should bar all entrance and exit. If Leithgow should be outside and want to get in, he knew where there was a contact which would signal the laboratory.

Next he went through the hideout once more, examining it foot by foot from ladder to lock, making sure that no one was inside, concealed. When that was done he went back to his prisoner and dragged him to the main laboratory, where he stood him in a corner and removed leg bonds, gag, and blind.

Esret was no beauty. He was taller than most Venusians, but had the skinny body, narrow head, and scrub-brush-like hair that was typical. Two things about him were striking—his nose, which had an ugly bend to one side, and a long pink scar which ran from one corner of his mouth nearly to his ear. Typical and striking both was his odor, which need not be described.

He had been angry, but when his blind came off and he saw who had taken him, fear swept him in its place. He backed involuntarily as far into the corner as he could get, his ugly, slightly misplaced eyes fastened on Carse like those of a rat cornered by a snake. The adventurer looked at him icily.

"You know me?" he asked.

Esret nodded rapidly twice.

"You know what I'll do to you if you don't answer my questions?" the Hawk asked.

Again the man nodded.

"What?"

"Kill me," he gulped.

"No, not kill you, torture you," Carse told him. "It's much worse." This seemed to make no impression on the man. "What is your job at the ranch?"

"Assistant overseer."

"Say, 'sir' when you speak to me."

"Yes, sir."

"Who is the foreman?"

"Lars Tantril, sir."

"Lars Tantril is dead!" the Hawk thundered.

"I don't know," the Venusian began, "—not for sure. He hasn't been back for six months."

"Six months," Carse clipped. He fixed the other with icy eyes. "Who is the owner of the ranch?"

The man's eyes rolled and he stuttered in his confusion.

"I—I don't know, sir."

"What—you don't know?" thundered the Hawk. "How long have you been working there?"

"Nearly three years, sir."

"You've been working there three years and still don't know who the owner is?"

"Yes, sir. I always took my orders from Lars Tantril."

"I see," said the Hawk coldly. Suddenly he asked:

"Who's been giving you your orders the last six months, with Tantril gone?"

The man could not hide that the question had trapped him. He attempted defiance.

"I refuse to tell you."

"Say it again and say 'sir.'"

"I refuse to tell you, sir," the man repeated, not so defiantly this time.

Deliberately the Hawk pulled his raygun and pointed it straight at the man's eyes. "Who gives you your orders?" he asked again.

"I won't tell you—sir."

THERE was a spitting streak of orange. The lobe of the man's right ear disappeared, and a thin wisp of smoke rose from the charred edge where it had just been. But the man, remarkably, only blinked at the pain he should have felt.

This was bad, and Carse knew at once he was in for trouble. There was a strain of Venusian which showed subnormal reaction to pain.* Esret clearly was one—and he was proving stubborn. The Hawk needed information badly; but how was he to break this man, make him tell what he knew, if he couldn't force him with pain or the threat of pain? He hesitated, thinking fast, but he let none of his indecision show in his stony face.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw something which gave him an idea.

"I see you're tough," he said to the man coolly; "I'll treat you to something special." He pointed to a table near one wall. "Lie down there," he ordered.

With a feeble attempt at bravado Esret obeyed. Carse caught up a coil of wire and tied him so he could not move.

"Did you ever hear of a guinea pig?" he asked the helpless man.

"No, sir," was the anxious reply.

"Well, you're going to have an experience," the adventurer promised him.

He crossed the room and brought back a long sharp knife, then piece by piece cut away all the Venusian's clothes from the waist up, casually dropping the pieces to the floor.

"We Earthmen find this a good deal of fun," he said, coolly looking at the man's stringy torso.

He crossed and returned with the small wire cage containing the two guinea pigs Leithgow had brought with him from Earth. He laid it by the head of the Venusian, then went back and found two long flat plastic strips.

"I want you to see what long front teeth they have," Carse said. With one strip he crowded one of the animals against the side of the cage and, after some difficulty pushed up its lip with the other, letting the Venusian see for himself out of his popping eyes how long its teeth were.

"Now, we Earthmen never let you see," the Hawk went on, "so let's do this." He bundled several towels around the neck of the man, so that they formed an arched collar in the shape of half a cruller below his chin. For a moment he surveyed his work. Then he said:

"Now comes the fun. I understand that you Venusians have a good way of having fun with a man, too. You take the skin off his body, all over, in little slices with a sharp knife. Well, this way is different. You are a tough man and can stand pain, so it won't hurt you very much. The fun is in seeing what happens. I put the cage on your belly. Like this."

HE placed the cage on top of the man just below his stomach.

"The next thing is to slide the bottom off of the cage, so that the guinea pigs stand on your bare belly. But they won't start eating—not unless they smell a little blood. So to start it I make a little scratch, and then the animals begin. They become very greedy,

* Even the man on the street today knows that people vary enormously in their capacity to stand, or feel, pain. History and medical literature are full of examples of men who have endured without apparent pain the most radical body damage. One of the most conspicuous examples of this—and one, too, which shows a racial angle—occurred during the first World War, when it was found that Negroes, in acute emergencies, could sometimes undergo major operations without benefit of an anaesthetic —Ed.

and they know that when they have eaten down far enough they can escape from the cage. You see? It's simple, but it's lots of fun. A tough man like you may not feel it much, but I can see it."

Carse put his hand on the bottom of the cage, then paused and looked at the Venusian. The man lay with mouth tightly closed, eyes popping. Beads of sweat stood out on his face. His chest was distended and tense, and his breath came in quick little pants.

"Who gives you your orders?" shot out Carse.

At the question Esret's face contorted, but he shook his head.

Carse slid out the bottom of the cage. When the Venusian felt the guinea pigs on his bare flesh he cried out in his native tongue and strained hard—and quite uselessly. Coolly, Carse picked up the knife and held it for the other to see.

"It begins when I scratch you," he said. "Do you want to tell me who gives you your orders?"

The man clenched his jaws, and did not make a sound.

"Well," said the Hawk, "it will go on till you tell me. Of course, after a while it will no longer do you any good to tell me."

Still the man would not talk. Carse stuck the knife through the bars of the cage and made a long, shallow cut. Blood poured out. Esret gave no sign that he felt anything. Probably he did not, for not only was he insensitive but the knife was very sharp. But he saw the knife's bloody edge when Carse removed it, and began straining and buckling as far as his bonds would permit.

His eyes nearly popped out of his head. In his fear he kept up his short, violent movements, continually stirring the guinea pigs up, so that he felt them moving and imagined them doing most horrible things.

Carse took his handkerchief and dipped it in the little puddle that was forming at the side of Esret's body. He held it up for him to see, and that unhappy man cried out again and again in Venusian. Carse said:

"When the guinea pigs have escaped the fun is all over."

HE watched coolly. Seconds passed. Esret's face now was soaking wet, and his mouth, no longer closed, moved in agony. For a moment he held his breath; but then it was all over. With an explosive emptying of his lungs he cried out:

"Stop it! I'll tell you! It's Ku Sui!"

"But Ku Sui is dead," Carse said coldly, not making the least move to remove the animals.

"No, no, he's alive! I've been seeing him!"

"Is he staying at the ranch?"

"Yes! Until last week! I don't know where he is now!"

"Think, Esret," the Hawk said coolly, as if the questioning could go on all day. "Where is he?"

"Take them a w a y ! " the man screamed. "I tell you I don't know!"

"Where is he, Esret?" Carse asked inexorably. "Isn't he near here somewhere? Right now? Isn't he?"

The Venusian writhed in agony.

"Yes!" he suddenly blurted. "He's here!"

"Where, Esret?"

"He's—he's—he's—"

"He's just behind you, my honored friend Carse," spoke a new voice, bland and unctuous.

The Hawk wheeled, raygun in hand —to meet an orange lance that laced into his weapon and sent it spinning.

"Ku Sui," he whispered.

The Eurasian stood there, negligently in his hand a raygun from which a wisp of smoke was curling.

"Ku Sui," he said too. "Not dead, but standing within these walls, and so happy to have this rare pleasure."

He smiled. There was the grace of a cat in his easy posture. Height and strength were his, and a figure as by a master sculptor. Beauty, too, of face, with skin of clearest saffron, ascetic cheeks, and the full sensitive lips of a poet. His hair was fine and black, and swept straightly back from the high narrow forehead where glowed his tremendous intelligence.

It was in his eyes that the clue to the man lay—his eyes of rare green that from a distance looked black. Slanted, hooded, unreadable beneath the long lashes, there lurked a tiger in their sinister depths.

"SO you've come for me, too," whispered Hawk Carse, and for a second he, too, smiled, with eyes cold as frosted steel. Striking was the contrast as these two old enemies faced each other—Carse, in blue denim trousers, torn work shirt, open at the neck, and old-fashioned rubber-soled sneakers; Ku Sui, exotic in a high-collared green silk blouse, full length trousers of the same material, and red slippers, to match the wide sash about his slender waist. A perfume hung about him, the indescribable odor of tsin-tsin flowers from the humid jungles of Venus.

"Where is Eliot Leithgow?" the adventurer whispered.

The Eurasian made a slightly deprecatory gesture with his free hand.

"Business," he sighed. "Always business. I wish we could have more time for the amenities."

His eyes turned without surprise to the suffering figure on the table.

"But I see you have a guest, an acquaintance of mine. And entertainment with two gentle little guinea pigs; that is so much fun. Lie still, Esret, or you'll frighten them." He fixed his eyes enigmatically on those of the Venusian. "Esret likes entertainment so much, my dear Carse. He finds it quite impossible to stay quietly at home." With the last words the tiger stirred in the inscrutible depths of his green eyes.

He turned back to Hawk Carse.

"I wouldn't," he said suddenly.

Carse, watching him like the Hawk he was called, had been on the point of rushing him.

Ku Sui sighed. "Trouble, trouble, there's so much trouble in the universe," he said. "Let us not make more. Or shall I take a simple precaution?" His free hand reached beneath his blouse and brought out a narrow metallic tube. "Forgive me, my old friend," he said, and pointed it at him. "This is not a raygun."

He seemed to squeeze it; and though no ray appeared, and no burnt hole was made, Hawk Carse slipped unconscious to the floor.

CHAPTER X

Mysterious Recordings

CARSE returned to consciousness gradually, wrestling with an irritating feeling that something forgotten but important had happened. It was only after some time that his eyes opened, to look into the anxious face of Eliot Leithgow, who was kneeling at his side.

"Are you all right?" the scientist asked.

Carse sat up and looked around, not comprehending. He saw that he was on the floor of a small oblong room, bare of every article of furniture. A single

tube in the ceiling threw a light that was reflected with little loss from the sides of gray metal walls that looked somehow familiar. Leithgow seemed to be aware of his thoughts.

"We're in one of the laboratory storerooms," he said. "Ku Sui emptied it to make a prison for us."

At mention of the hated Eurasian's name memory returned to the Hawk with a rush. He got at once to his feet, and the other did the same.

"So he got you too, Eliot," Carse said. "How did it happen? And how long have I been here?"

"He came some time after you left us," the old man said. "It's incredible. We'd thought the hideout tight and impregnable, but Ku Sui just appeared. I was alone in the laboratory, I heard his voice and looked up, and there he was. It was as if he had been there all the time, invisible. I suppose we should not be surprised if he can make himself invisible, since he could do it to his asteroid.

"That's all I know about how it happened. He spoke to me for a few minutes, then pointed a kind of tube at me that rendered me unconscious. When I came to I found myself here, in this room. He had taken out the stores."

"Where are Ban and Friday and the doctor?" Carse asked.

"I don't know. I suppose he surprised them too."

"Did he have any of his men with him?"

"I didn't see any."

For a moment the Hawk stroked his bangs, considering.

"There's no doubt Ku Sui's taking over your lab," he said abruptly. "He has the original strips and recorder, and now he has control of your equipment, all set up. All he has to do is substitute his originals for your substitutes, and in no time at all he will once more have the five scientists—and his five will live."

The old man's shoulders drooped, and he sighed deeply.

"And out of them he will make another set of Coordinated Brains!" he said. "I tell you, Carse, I can hardly bear to think of it!"

"You've not mentioned the worst thing," the Hawk reminded him gently. "This time he may want six brains."

"I shall kill myself first," the old man said simply. "I'll watch him very carefully, and if that seems to be his plan I'll kill myself."

CARSE laid his hand on Leithgow's shoulders.

"Well, don't be in any hurry about it," he said awkwardly. "He hasn't done anything to us yet. I'm slated to be tortured to death, I suppose—lingeringly, when he can spare the time." He stopped, and with narrowed eyes began examining the bare expanse of wall.

"We're going to find some way to get out of here," he announced incisively.

The scientist shook his head.

"You and I built this place," he said gloomily, "and no one knows better than we how tight we made it. Those walls are six inches—"

"Sh-h!" Carse whispered, indicating the door.

There had been a sound there, and now the door opened and Ku Sui entered and stood just inside, graceful and exotic in the long beautiful lines of his green silk costume. The man's strange green eyes glowed enigmatically in his delicately cut ascetic face, and about the corners of his lips hovered his ever-present enigmatic smile. Behind him, impassive, rayguns steady on the two, stood two of his unfortunate creatures, coolies whose brains he had altered, making them little more than robot-

slaves of his will.

"We meet again," he said in the bland, beautifully-modulated voice they knew so well. Deferentially he stepped nearer.

"It is a delight to me," he went on. "Several months ago during an unforgettable experience you were my hosts

The robot-like slaves stood behind him

in this very laboratory, and now it would seem that I am yours. Time passes, only change remains. Let me greet you in return of your hospitality.

"Please forgive my not making you more comfortable," he said. "It is a distress to me, but the necessity arises out of a very great respect for you. The resourcefulness and daring of Hawk Carse are already a legend, and it would seem a poor return of your former kindness to leave at hand any object which might be used in an attempt at escape—and your consequent hurt."

The Hawk had listened like a man of stone.

"Where are my three other men?" he cut in frigidly.

"They are in another room, quite well," came the smooth, ready answer. "That, too, is a regret to me, but it seemed wise to keep you separated."

ELIOT LEITHGOW never took his eyes from the face of this man who so long and cruelly had twisted his life.

"What are your intentions here, Ku Sui?" he asked.

"But perhaps you can guess," the Eurasian said with affectation of tactful surprise. "You will remember that I once possessed a set of Coordinated Brains, a pyramid of genius, and that I suffered the misfortune of having them taken away. I have missed them so much. I am in a great predicament. You see, my own poor talents are limited, and I have certain ambitions, and time passes so rapidly."

"You're going to make another set of five men?"

"I need them so badly," the Eurasian answered.

"In my laboratory?"

"If you will be so generous. Allow me to compliment you, Dr. Leithgow; it is a magnificent establishment. I shall hardly miss the one I had on my asteroid.

"But that reminds me," he went on; "I have a small matter of business with you, Carse, and after that another with you," he said, looking at the scientist. "It is nothing, a mere trifle, and won't take a minute. Will you be so gracious as to come with me?" he asked smiling, his green eyes again on the Hawk.

"What is it you want?" asked Carse coldly.

"It's hardly anything," the Eurasian said. "Please now—to the big laboratory. It would be well to walk slowly, and not raise your arms or attempt any reckless thing. My two servitors will be right behind you."

Frostily the Hawk regarded him for a moment. He turned to Leithgow.

"I'll be back," he said, and his tone was that of one making a promise.

Ku Sui said to Leithgow:

"Please forgive me for taking him from you. He shall return in just a moment."

The Eurasian closed and locked the door and Carse, followed by the others, proceeded to the main laboratory. There Ku Sui took position by a chair on the far side of the same table on which Esret had lain, and indicated another chair placed opposite.

"Will you please sit there," he asked.

Carse stood a moment narrowly scanning the room, then he sat down. The Eurasian sat down, too.

"Thank you," he said. "Now for the little thing I must ask of you." He pointed to a black plastic box which lay in front of the Hawk. "That box contains a piece of apparatus of my own devising," the Eurasian said. "In the angled face turned toward you is a circular aperture. I want you, if you will, to put your lips to that aperture and say these words: 'This is the genesis of a great event.' That is all. Just say, 'This is the genesis of a great event.' "

CARSE looked at the box, then up and across at his arch foe.

"Why do you want a second Hawk Carse in the world?" he asked.

The Eurasian smiled.

"You have guessed it," he admitted; "it is a recorder. But let me tell you, I most certainly do not want another Hawk Carse in the solar system. Of all possible things, not that. This experiment has an entirely different purpose."

The Hawk sat upright in his chair, eyes straight across the apparatus into Ku Sui's. Deliberately he said:

"Ku Sui, I'm going to get out of this, and then I'm going to kill you."

He rose. Ku Sui sighed.

"I thought I might find you more cooperative," he said sadly. "Of course, that might be a lot to expect." He too rose. "All right. Perhaps Dr. Leithgow will oblige me."

They started back. As they went the adventurer's thoughts flew rapidly. Something was wrong. It wasn't at all like Ku Sui to accept defeat like that. What was the real purpose of the "experiment"? Why had Ku Sui given up so easily?

One of the yellow men unlocked the door of his room and the Hawk entered.

"Will you come now, please, Dr. Leithgow?" the Eurasian asked.

"He wants you to make a recording," Carse said clearly. "Of course you'll refuse."

Leithgow showed surprise, then smiled.

"Of course I shall refuse," he said, and the door closed behind him.

Alone in the locked room Carse walked from corner to corner trying to puzzle out the Eurasian's purpose. It didn't make sense. The "experiment" could have no purpose other than to get a record of his voice. And such a recording surely could have value only for the making of a Carse duplicate. But why such a duplicate? Why should Ku Sui, of all men, want another enemy Hawk Carse in existence?

The Eurasian had taken his refusal without insisting. Why? Why had he permitted him to warn Leithgow? Why did he want Leithgow's recording, anyway, since he had the man himself a prisoner?

There seemed no answers to these questions. At least, he concluded, he had not lost the first round of the duel with the Eurasian.

But soon Carse stopped short with a new thought. Perhaps he had lost the round. Perhaps Ku Sui had gotten the recording. There were pickup arrangements that did not require close

placement of the lips. His lips had been nearly two feet from the aperture, and he had spoken well over the top of it when replying to Ku Sui, but it was possible that Ku Sui was using a sensitive transmitter arranged for just those conditions!

Yes, the Eurasian's instructions to speak his own set of words with lips touching the aperture might have been a skillful misdirection! It was as clear as daylight, now when it was too late!

Carse's face stiffened. Eliot was in there at that moment, falling for the trick!

But still unexplained was why Ku Sui would even want their recordings.

CHAPTER XI

The Secret Room

IMPATIENTLY the Hawk waited for Leithgow's return, and when he heard a sound at the lock of the door he spun and faced in that direction. The scientist entered with head erect, and behind him the door closed and locked again.

"Did you?" Carse whispered.

"No," was the firm answer.

"But did you sit in the chair across from him?"

"Yes, but I kept away from the aperture. I was almost two feet away from it."

"Did you say anything in that position?"

"He wanted me to say, 'This is the genesis of a great event,' but I refused. "I told him, 'Before me sits the world's greatest skunk.' "

Carse turned away.

"He got you too, then," he said. He explained the suspicion that had come to his mind, and Leithgow saw at once that there were grounds for it.

"But why should he want my recording when he has me here, his prisoner?" the old man asked.

"I don't know," said Carse.

"Do you think there was any significance about his asking us both to say the same sentence?"

"I don't know," was the answer. "But I wouldn't be surprised if the meaning of the words was significant. Something important is under way, I'm sure." Thoughtfully Carse stroked his flaxen bangs. "One thing, we can take it for granted that his purpose in getting our recordings is something ugly and maybe dangerous. We've got to try to prevent his using them, somehow. And that means we've got to escape from this room, and quickly!"

With sudden energy he set about examining the room. It did not look promising; there was nothing but the bare walls and light tube—nothing that might suggest a way of escape. He put his hands in his pockets. Everything there had been removed. Leithgow produced only a handkerchief and one large Martian coin, a pocket piece.

"It will have to be by the door," Carse said. "A sudden rush when someone enters."

"No, Carse," the old man protested; "the two coolie-robots are stationed there. I heard Ku Sui give them orders."

Carse went to the door and listened.

"Someone's there," he said. He thought a moment. "It looks bad. They could be rushed, but you'd be of no use, and that would leave it wholly up to me. One man couldn't do it without a gun or some kind of protection." Again his eyes swept the walls.

THE room was lined with heavy aluminum alloy panels, each a yard wide and reaching from floor to ceiling. One of them, in the middle of the side

opposite the door, had a faint brownish smear that automatically attracted the eye.

"Give me that coin," he ordered crisply.

Leithgow handed it to him. Carse touched its edge to the groove in the head of one of the screws holding the panel to the heavy plastic backing which lay behind. It was too thick to fit. He at once sat down and began rubbing one part of the edge against the smooth metal floor. As he did this he explained:

"When I can get the screws out, one of those panels will make me a shield."

Leithgow looked on encouragingly, and, when the coin grew too hot to hold, gave Carse his handkerchief to wrap around it. Progress was disheartening. The floor was so smooth it would not abrade.

It took nearly an hour to get the edge down to size, and by that time both men had cramps and blisters; but when Carse at last stood before the middle panel and got the coin into one of the screws, that screw turned. All came out readily, and Leithgow loaned his back as a ladder for the last two, at the top.

Carse had difficulty in prying the panel from the plastic backing. At last he got it started, but when the edge had been pulled out a few inches he suddenly stopped short and stared back in the parting with surprise.

"Come here," he whispered to Leithgow.

The scientist went close and looked. Behind the panel the wall was pierced by a large elliptical hole, and beyond the back of this hole, where there should have been packed dirt or rock, there seemed to be a large cavity. With one wrench Carse pulled the panel clear. The light in the ceiling passed through the hole to show what appeared to be a dirt floor. The Hawk stuck his head in, looked all around, then withdrew it.

"There's a chamber or passage along the outside of the wall," he said. "It was burnt out; see the shape of the hole in the plastic and the smooth melted edges, and see that panel: the brown is a burn that goes all the way through. This looks good; it might be Ku Sui's work. I'm going in. You'd better come too. There may be a way to the surface."

At once he slid the metal panel back into place, then, letting its lower edge act as a hinge, allowed the top to fall across the room till it rested at an angle against the door. Excited as he was, Eliot Leithgow had to smile at the speed and utility of this act. It made an excellent wedge to brace the door from within.

A moment later the two men were through the hole.

It was a passage as the Hawk had said—low, narrow, burned out of the dirt and rock. At random Carse chose the side toward the back of the hideout, and quietly, feeling their way through the darkness, they went ahead for about thirty feet until their groping hands reached a dead end.

They retraced their steps, passing the perforation in the wall and groping foot by foot over the rough rock and plastic walling in the opposite direction. For an estimated fifty yards they felt their way, until they came to a place where the off wall fell some distance back. This was a room. Their hands told them no other passage led out of it.

"One thing is clear," the Hawk whispered where he and Leithgow came to a stop somewhere in the area, "this is Ku Sui's doing. He burnt out this place while we were on Earth, then before we arrived he set himself here and waited. There wasn't any invis-

ibility; he just has an entrance into the lab somewhere."

"No question," Leithgow agreed. "But he must have had light. Let's find it."

A FEW minutes later light flooded the place, and it was he who had found the switch.

The room was long but not so wide as it had seemed in the dark, and was barely furnished with two collapsible cots, two chairs, and a table with a lower shelf, both levels littered with scientific books, tools, instruments, and, on the top, some tinned food and one large unfamiliar piece of apparatus from which rose a vertical sheet of ground glass.

Plainly visible at one end of the room was a metal door through the laboratory wall—Ku Sui's way of entrance. The edges were clean, and looked as if they had been sliced with an electric cutter. On one side large hinges were neatly inserted, and on the other there was a catch lever and a lock. Momentarily snapping out the light, Carse very slowly and carefully tried the lever. It would not move. The door was locked.

"There might be an entrance leading up to the surface," Carse said. "You examine this room very carefully and I'll go back and look along the passage."

Silently he left, and returned in a few minutes to report that there was none there, and learn that there was none in the room either.

"Well," he said, looking at the door, "we've got to go in through there. There are at least some tools." He went to the table and began taking stock of them.

The presence of the large apparatus on top of the table had been bothering Leithgow, and now he went close and examined it curiously. It lay on the middle, a few inches from the hideout wall, and at a quick glance was like a large, open and extremely complicated three-dimensional-color television circuit. In the heart of it was a cross web of wires surrounding what looked like a crystal. In the front of the case was a panel containing several knobs. The ground glass plate was about a square foot in size and looked as if it might be a screen.

Carse, finished with his inventory, watched as he turned the knobs and studied the apparatus.

"See if there's a wire leading from this into the wall," Leithgow said.

The Hawk looked. "Yes," he said. "It's plugged into a current outlet—the same line that feeds the light."

"Is there any other?"

He looked again, carefully. "No," he said finally. "And I don't see any provision for any."

"M-m-m!" breathed the scientist. "Please turn out the light."

Carse did it. The click of a thrown switch cut through the intense darkness. Slowly the ground glass began to lighten—and then, to his great surprise, an angle of the interior of the main laboratory clarified on the screen. The view was one which would be had by a person standing where they were—if the wall had been removed—and only one shallow plane seemed in sharp focus.

APPARENTLY very close, his back to them, sat Ku Sui, in the chair he had occupied at the table while trying to get Hawk Carse to record his sentence.

"I don't understand," the Hawk said. "If there's no wire leading through the wall to a pickup, how can we be getting this?"

"It's something new," Leithgow said, his fingers trembling a little with ex-

citement. "It's what is sometimes called a search beam in imaginative literature. The apparatus focusses right through material obstructions and records what it sees on the screen. Let's try something."

He turned one of the knobs. As he did the right-hand part of the image slid off the screen and more of the left side of the laboratory appeared. He turned another knob, and the plane of sharp focus came nearer. Another widened the angle of view. Still another increased the brightness.

"He sat here and watched everything we did!" Leithgow said, looking up suddenly at the adventurer and referring of course to Ku Sui. "The man's a genius, a great genius! What a calamity for the world that his ego is so warped!"

Carse's thoughts were more practical.

"It'll be a calamity for you if we don't get out of here," he said bluntly. "Eliot—we have work to do! First, get busy with that apparatus. I want to know every detail of the situation in there—how many men there are, who they are, where they are, what they're doing. Go through it from end to end, methodically. I don't want to barge through that door into any surprises."

Leithgow had to smile. "All right, Carse—you give the orders," he said cheerfully.

He brought the beam to focus on the far end of the main laboratory and, starting there, swept through it to the radio room at the other end. Ku Sui sat as before, and was alone. It passed through the wall and into a lighted, empty radio room and part of the corridor outside, and then for a moment the room-side of the screen was dark as it passed through a small unlighted laboratory. Next showed a bare room where a metal panel lay wedged against the door—their cell—and two coolie-robots on guard outside, and beyond that the dark space of another unlighted room. In the next appeared a bare room and the three welcome figures of Ban Wilson, Friday, and Dr. Warren. Ban was fidgetting in one corner, the physician sat thoughtfully with his back to the wall, and the Negro was leaning his large bulk against the door, gloomy as a black sky full of rain.

"Thank heaven they're safe!" murmured Leithgow.

"Keep on," the Hawk ordered, intent with his survey.

NO more lighted rooms of this row appeared on the screen, so the scientist followed the corridor all the way to the ozi stump entrance. So far, the only enemies seen were the Eurasian and his two yellow men.

On the beam's return trip through the rooms on the other side of the corridor, all showed dark till it came to the nearest room but one to the main laboratory, and that one held a surprise. It too was bare, and on the floor, bound and gagged, lay two men —the Venusian, Esret, and a white man, an Earthman, someone with gray hair whose face they could not see for the gag. The two observers studied him for some time but learned nothing—except that Ku Sui had another enemy, or perhaps victim, and that Esret was being roughly handled for his disobedience in leaving the ranch and seeking entertainment.

"Go on," snapped Carse.

The sight in the next room caused the blue-veined hands of old Leithgow to tremble on the knobs. Here were five men, white Earthmen, every one familiar and every one his friend. Ku Sui had lost no time. Already that

laboratory held a new Cram, Estapp, Swanson, Geinst, and Sir Norman.

"Those five will live," murmured Leithgow.

"Not the bodies, if Ku Sui gets to their brains!" said the Hawk grimly.

The old scientist's eyes flooded and he lowered his head.

"Look," whispered the Hawk.

The two robot-coolies had entered the cell, rayguns at the ready, and were now giving an order to the group. Expressions of anger showed clearly in the tiny images of the faces of the scientists; then all blurred as the five filed out in front of the two yellow men and passed through the radio room into the laboratory. Leithgow's fingers worked sensitively at the knobs to hold them in view, and succeeded in catching the back of Ku Sui as he rose at their entrance.

From the attitude of the five they listened for a moment while the Eurasian spoke to them; but then suddenly angry looks again broke out on their faces, and, as their lips moved, there must also have been angry words. The wall was soundproof and there was no clue to what they were saying, but they seemed to be expostulating, and one of them, the German, Geinst, waved his arms up and down. Ku Sui apparently was exerting all his powers of persuasion, for little by little they subsided, although there were still black looks.

Then—to the amazement of the two observers—Sir Norman went over and sat in the chair before the recorder, and Ku Sui sat again in his chair on the side of the table opposite.

"The same thing!" whispered Leithgow. "More recordings—of men already in his power! What can be his purpose?"

"Watch Norman's lips," whispered the Hawk.

CHAPTER XII

The Strange Message

NORMAN sat motionless, a slight look of contempt on his face; but then, looking over the top of the apparatus in exactly the position of Carse and Leithgow before, he moved his lips, and the two watchers knew what words were spoken as surely as if they had been in the room.

"This is the genesis of a great event."

The words seemed to ring in their ears.

In the light from the screen puzzled lines showed in the old scientist's face.

"I can't understand," he whispered. "Any words will do for the recordings, but Ku Sui always seems to want exactly those. Is it only whim, or perhaps vanity? That would explain why he gave up so quickly after getting different ones from us. Let's watch. I think he's going to do the same with all five."

Leithgow was right. Swanson was now in the chair, and his lips too formed those words. Then, following him in quick succession, the remaining men sat as had the others and the lips of each one formed the words of the cryptic sentence. Ku Sui rose, and the robot-coolies started the five scientists back to their cell.

"All five of the men were forced," Leithgow said; "but they all spoke the words. What's next, I wonder?"

"Next I want to see the locks and the inside of the ships," Carse said pointedly. "You seem to forget we have the problem of escaping from here."

Smiling, without a word, the scientist adjusted for depth, and quickly was passing back through the corridor outside the water chamber. The chamber, they found, was dark, and so were the interiors of the aircar and ship.

Leithgow turned to the adventurer.

"That covers the whole lab," he said. "Unless there's someone in the unlighted rooms, Ku Sui has only his two robot-coolies, with Erset and that other man prisoners."

"Get Ku Sui's door and follow it through the wall," Carse ordered at once. "I want a better look at where it cuts through."

Leithgow pulled in the beam, but as its plane of focus passed through the laboratory he saw something that made him stop and make local adjustments.

Ku Sui was again at the table, and opposite him this time sat the man who had lain a prisoner with Esret in the cell. His gag had been removed, and they saw he had an intelligent lined face with thin lips and a high forehead half hidden by tumbled gray hair. His feet were free, but his hands still were bound behind him. He sat as if neither angry nor afraid of the Eurasian.

His lips moved. Closely the two watchers scanned them. "This is the genesis of a great event," they said. An enigmatic smile lit the man's eyes.

Again those words. Why did the Eurasian want the recording of this man?

A SURPRISING thing happened then. Ku Sui rose and started walking in the direction of the radio room—and the second the table was at his back the bound man turned his head and looked straight at the two observers on the other side of the wall! His eyes seemed to be focussed on them! It was as if the wall was not there!

Carse's eyes locked on the man. Goose flesh crept over the susceptible Leithgow.

But at once there was more—something startling. An expression of eager excitement swept the man's face; his eyes widened, and he began to make short jerking glances downward to one side, each time returning his eyes to their apparent focus on the two beyond the wall.

"Can he have a tic?" wondered the scientist. "Surely not. That wall is six inches thick—black plastic and metal—I watched it built; why didn't the tic start till he turned and faced us?"

"If the wall were transparent, I should say he's trying to give us some message," whispered the Hawk, watching intently.

"But the wall isn't transparent," objected the other firmly.

The strange behavior continued with even greater intensity, the man's head making slight parallel jerks in time with his eyes. Twice the motions ceased for a second while the eyes in the image looked right at them with a frantic look of pleading.

The whole incident took only a fraction of a minute, and stopped abruptly when Ku Sui returned to the man's side. The two robot-coolies followed behind him, and the Eurasian gave them an order. In the image the bound man's face seemed to pale, and for a moment he spoke emphatically, while Ku Sui listened with a cruel smile. The coolies took the bound man away.

Still smiling, the Eurasian walked around the table and lifted from behind the side something small attached to a long insulated wire. With this in hand he went back and sat in the seat which the bound man had just left. His fingers moved; then across the top of the recorder, in exactly the position of all the other men who had sat there, he spoke, and his lips, like the others, formed the words: "This is the genesis of a great event."

Now his smile was one of triumph. He got up, removed something the two

observers could not see from the interior of the recording cabinet, and took it to a table on the far side of the room. Then he started putting apparatus in place.

"Get the bound man again," Carse ordered crisply. "If he was trying to give us some message he may still be

Leithgow turned one of the knobs

trying. There's something familiar about his face."

"That's funny," Leithgow remarked. "I felt the same thing, but it was so faint I didn't bother to mention it."

He searched for his cell, and found it.

But he was too late. That man, they saw, would never try anything again. He lay motionless on his back along one wall, and in the middle of his right temple was a burnt hole from which a thin stream of blood was trickling. Across from him lay the body of Esret, his head in a pool of blood and his face a raw mess.

ON THE left of the screen showed a section of the corridor outside the room. The two robot-coolies were standing there, and one of them was impassively returning to his belt holster a raygun.

"That devil, devil, devil!" cried Leithgow, hands across his eyes. "One had disobeyed him, the other he was through with—so he killed them! God have mercy on his soul!"

Carse stood behind him with a face like stone.

"That man was trying to tell us something," he said after a moment. "Both of us must have seen him somewhere. He might have recognized us; known we were here, somehow. I think he was trying to help us. By helping us he might be helped himself. He too was Ku Sui's prisoner."

This thought roused Leithgow.

"Yes," he said, "but that assumes he could see us through the wall. Unless," he added, struck by a new thought, "—unless he could sense we were there. But telepathy—"

"It clicks!" cried the Hawk interrupting. "I have him! He's Meeker, the sensitive called in by the psychiatrists in connection with the re-embodied Brains! I saw a television shot of him at the time!"

"And so did I—the same shot!" cried Leithgow, fired. "Ku Sui must have kidnapped him—brought him from Earth! But why? Why did he take Meeker's recording?"

"I don't know," Carse said; "but Meeker knew we were here and was trying to tell us something. Now what? His eyes kept jerking downwards, to his left; also his head a little. He didn't dare let Ku Sui catch him.

"Let's see," said the Hawk. He turned on the light and took again his position before the screen. Downward to his own right the dirt floor was bare and showed nothing of interest. Nowhere in that direction was there anything but the lower shelf of the table with its confusion of tools and apparatus. He had already looked that stuff over, but now he took it out piece by

piece and laid it on the floor. At his right, beneath other small apparatus, he found something unfamiliar that had escaped attention before. It was a brown metal object the size and shape of a very flat drum. There were handles with levers on opposite sides of its circumference and a small hole in one side. Attached to it was an insulated electric cord several yards long.

"What is this?" he asked Leithgow.

The scientist examined it.

"I don't know," he said. "It seems to be a complete unit, so let's plug it in and see what happens."

There was an outlet at the side of the light just overhead, and he put the prongs in. Nothing happened. Laying it hole up, flat on the table, he moved one of the levers. Nothing happened. He moved the other and nothing happened. Then he moved both at once—and nearly fell over backwards with surprise.

STRAIGHT up out of the little hole appeared a thin cone of dazzling, crackling red, and the place in the ceiling at its far end became the focus of a brilliant shower of sparks. For but an instant this lasted till Leithgow, backing, let go the lever—but when Carse examined the ceiling he found a hole an inch deep there.

"It's a disintegrating ray," he said; "a type I haven't seen. Melts like butter. Come on, Eliot, we're going in after Ku Sui. We'll go through his door. First, find it in your beam; I must know just where it cuts through. When we're ready we'll watch Ku Sui and pick a moment when he and the coolies are out of the way. It should be easy. Quick, now—we've been here a long time. I'll look for wire; we'll need a lot, to reach far into the lab."

He started going through the materials, throwing in one pile everything that had lengths of insulated wire. A moment later the scientist called to him.

"Look," he said glumly, and held up a small piece of rock. "The beam doesn't work. I found this in the wiring. It must have been broken from the ceiling by the ray."

"Did it crack a tube?"

"I don't know; they look all right. But it mashed into that web of fine wires,"—here he pointed to the peculiar element which enclosed what seemed to be a crystal "and probably cracked off some insulation, causing a short. See for yourself."

Carse looked, and it was as he had said. It might be difficult to repair, for the web was very fine, and the insulation minutely thin and colorless.

"We need that beam badly, Eliot," the Hawk said. "If we can watch the lab and pick our time we can't fail. Will you try to get it going?"

Leithgow shrugged his shoulders, but smiled.

"I'll try," he said simply, and went straight to work.

Carse proceeded with his search for wire; and by robbing everything in the room, and even shortening the wire leading to the overhead light, he built up a line nearly fifty feet in length. He wanted much more, but that probably would be enough. Meanwhile the scientist worked intensely at what proved a discouraging task.

AN HOUR passed, and the screen would not respond. Carse looked on, tried to help, ate some food from the table, paced up and down irritably —always with the projector connected and ready in his hands; Leithgow hardly took his eyes out of the circuit except to wipe the sweat from his face and head. At last Carse could stand it no longer.

"Drop it, Eliot," he said. "We can't wait any longer—too dangerous. It might take a day."

"I think we'd better," agreed the scientist, straightening up with some relief; "it would be taking too big a chance."

"All right, then, we act," Carse clipped. "Come here."

He led Leithgow to Ku Sui's door and handed him a long metal tube bent into a hook at the end.

"Now listen carefully," he said. "You stand at the side of the door holding this hook I've prepared. When I give the word I'll put the ray on the lock of the door. When I've melted through I'll cut the ray. The instant the ray goes off you run the hook into the hole and pull the door open; and then, when I've passed through, run to the outlet where this thing draws its current and stay there, your hand on the plug. I'll go in as far as the wire lets me. When you see the wire become straight, pull out the plug and come running, and plug it in again, inside, wherever I say. Is that clear?"

"Quite," said Leithgow.

"I want speed," Carse said. "Loss of one second could be fatal. You understand?"

"Count on me, Carse," said the old man, smiling.

"All right, then." The Hawk placed Leithgow by the door, stood back about five feet, took a good grip on the projector, and aimed it.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Ready," came the answer.

"Then—" But he did not finish. As he started the word, the room was plunged into darkness.

Instantly Carse turned and squeezed both levers of the projector, to test it. It was dead.

"Steady, Eliot," he whispered. "The current's off. Here, hold this. I'll go check the line. I had to shorten it in the dark, and must have made a poor connection."

He felt for Leithgow, handed him the projector, and slipped off through the darkness.

A minute passed. Suddenly, then, light appeared—but it came from a flash, and with it sounded a low mocking laugh. Pitilessly the two men stood exposed in the beam, and pitiless too seemed a faint odor of tsin-tsin flowers.

Their visitor was Ku Sui.

"Please come into the laboratory, my friends," said his familiar velvet voice behind the flash. "There has been a power failure, but I think we shall be comfortable in a few minutes. At least we shall have some light."

CHAPTER XIII

The Coming of Unborn Q

HAWK CARSE stood against the laboratory wall with lowered head and face of icy stone, and at his side stood old Leithgow, torn, dirty, frail under the weight of this last crushing blow. The hands of both were tied behind their backs. Off to one side the two robot-coolies held unwavering ray-guns pointed at their chests.

Suave before them, impeccable as always in his beautiful green costume, stood their terrible enemy, Ku Sui. His smile glittered, persisted; tigers looked out of his strange green eyes, then left, then came again; dark triumph held him. He looked at his victims.

"It has been a play," he said; "long, with many acts—bloody—and each of us the hero. The curtain now falls, and at last we shall see that we have been acting a tragedy. Two shall go on, for 'This is the genesis of a great event.' Two of us shall not, for this is the exodus of the two great antag-

onists. Fate wills. I am your fate.

"Here we three are," he went on. "How we have fought! I wanted your brain, Leithgow, and but for Carse I should have had it. It turns out he did me a service. I do not want it any more. How little we know what is good for us!"

Slowly the glittering smile lessened.

"I needed my Coordinated Brains at the time. I had used them, found them most valuable, and when I lost them I was much hampered. So when I arrived on Earth after my supposed death I decided to make myself another set. An even better set. Why not include, for instance, the brain of a good sensitive? Might not the addition increase immeasurably my personal safety and power? How, then, could an enemy sneak up to do me harm? How could his secret plans remain secret from me?

"Sensitives can be bought, and I paid the price of the world's best. Meeker became my man. Through my contacts I arranged to have him used in the experiments with the patients in the hospital, for at first I intended to snatch those men and use their brains again. But at the same time I set him to catch your thoughts, Leithgow, and so I learned of the existence of the reembodying technique. After that I no longer wanted any brains at all.

"Meeker could not catch all the complicated detail of the technique, and I had to have it. I could have kidnapped you, Leithgow, and perhaps obtained it by certain ministrations of pain, but more subtle action seemed better; so I first ferretted out the existence and location of the five strips and recorder, then secretly obtained them and made substitutes which I left in their places. Did my little note amuse you?

"I KNOW I shall always smile when I think how I managed to direct the actions of you two men. In not one essential have you acted as free agents. I arranged the planting in your minds of the very idea of your attempt. There are means. I had planted there the step which led to your 'discovery' of the existence of the strips and recorder. I had planted the first seed of your decision to make the attempt in this laboratory. After that, knowing where your laboratory was, all I had to do was come here, prepare the room beyond that wall, install the interesting gadget which you found and played with, and, just before your arrival, go in and wait with Meeker and two of my servitors.

"I trusted you completely, Leithgow, and you did not fail me. Everything ticked like a watch. You obtained and assembled all your apparatus here. Meeker caught and wrote down your thoughts, step by step. I watched. It was so simple; you were so unwittingly obliging. Parenthetically let me say I cannnot admire too much your skill and speed.

"When I was ready I couldn't catch both of you together, or there was always some obstacle to my entering; so I took you, Leithgow, and the other men first, and brought you unconscious into my observation room until our little adventurer should have returned. Ah, Carse, I've never so enjoyed myself as I did when I watched you 'having fun' with Esret. I had a sound pickup on the wall at the time, and caught every word. Of course it was rather too bad for Esret that he disobeyed my orders and left the ranch. I have had to entertain him himself. Along with Meeker.

"I had much work to do then. I, of course, had the original strip and recorder with me, and I connected them into your apparatus in the place left vacant by the substitutes. It took

time; I had to be very careful and do much studying; even now I have not learned everything essential to the principles and the assembly. I created my own set of five scientists, and it took time to control them. They were very angry, very difficult."

Leithgow's curiosity got the better of him.

"Why did you make them if you don't want their brains?" he blurted out suddenly, speaking for the first time.

The Eurasian smiled.

"Don't you see yet?" he asked. "With all your achievements in science, Leithgow, you are as innocent as a child. I don't want the five men; they shall be destroyed in just a few minutes. I did want their recordings, made under my own conditions. I had to create the men first to get them."

"Why did you want their recordings?" asked Leithgow. "And why did you want Carse's, and mine, and Meeker's, and your own?"

AGAIN came the Eurasian's mocking smile.

"Carse's? You may be sure I did not want him for his intellect. But the little man has something, certain qualities of resourcefulness and daring which I have sometimes admired in a small way. I have paid him a great compliment. Your brain, Leithgow, is superior to any of the five scientists. Meeker's has the extremely valuable faculty of being sensitive to mind waves. And my own—well, it's nothing in particular; I suppose I am represented only for my vanity."

He laughed.

"You still don't see," he said. "Didn't you discover that I tricked you and Carse into making recordings under identical conditions? Didn't you discover that all the others were made under the same identical conditions? The same conditions and the same apparatus?"

"They weren't, quite," Leithgow objected. "Carse and myself each spoke different sentences."

"'This is the genesis of a great event,'" quoted Ku Sui, smiling. He shrugged his shoulders. "The words are unimportant. It merely pleased my sense of irony, my vanity, to hear them spoken so innocently and so truly.

"You still don't see," Ku Sui said again. "It must be true that the great ideas are the simple, inobvious ones. I'll tell you. Five coordinated brains were very valuable but awkward to maintain and use. What if I had them all in one brain?—would not that be much better? What if I could have this one brain in one living, human body, subject to my direction and control? –would that not be better yet?"

As he said this, Ku Sui's eyes glittered, and he spoke with an excitement the two had never seen in him before.

"But it was possible to improve on the five brains. What if this one brain included yours and mine? What if it had the telepathic faculty of Meeker? What if it had the courage and resourcefulness of the adventurer Carse?

"Now at last you see," he went on, sparkling with triumph. "I got the voice records of nine men, each unparalleled in one or more branches of knowledge, one or more faculties, or one or more dominant traits. Out of the waves on these nine records I have made a record which has but one wave, the composite of them all! With that strip I could make a new man, who had never lived before!

"Averaging in the composite, if it occurred, would reduce the peak of some of his faculties, but from the outstanding subjects used it could be positively predicted that there would be

produced a man of unthinkably broad and overpowering genius!

"I WILL admit, however, that there were questions. It happens I know far more about the physiology and psychology of the brain than any man living, but even I could not be sure of many extremely important characteristics of such a composite. Would the man show a dead average in every specific physical and mental factor? Would there be nine different facets to his personal equation, so that he could have not only nine different sets of information and memories, but, perhaps, nine different sets of glandular and emotional and conditioned patterns and behaviors as well? Most interesting of all to me, would one of the nine assembled egos dominate the composite?

"My plans call for practical use of this composite man, but merely as a question mark he would be tremendously interesting. Of course the questions would be answered only when I made him. Pending his arrival I have always thought of him as the great Question, the 'Q', the Unborn Q."

Ku Sui paused, then with dramatic suddenness said:

"I have made this Unborn Q."

The green eyes seemed to shoot sparks. Wordless, with total intentness, the two watched the man.

"I have wanted power," the Eurasian went on. "I have needed power. I have needed power as men need air. I have obtained particles of it in the past, first by the exertions of my own brain alone, and later, in greater measure, with the help afforded by the Coordinated Brains. But always with the Brains I was in a sense at their mercy, for they were awkward to handle, they needed constant attention, and there were too many unanticipatable things which might go wrong with them. And then they were somewhat limited in power. I could not, for instance, put my own brain among them.

"But now my victory is sealed! All in one living man is the help I require! Q is no longer a thought in my mind; he exists! There has been no time for detailed examination of his powers, but I have seen already that they are enormous. He possesses Meeker's telepathic faculty! It was he who at the last moment warned me that you were at liberty in my observation room, and read me your thoughts! And it was he who with split-second functioning suggested what I should do! I saw there your own prompt resourcefulness, Carse! And most important of all, he did this voluntarily! He will be amenable to my will! He is my man!"

"Where is this Unborn Q?" whispered the Hawk.

Ku Sui walked over to one side where all this time the laboratory screen had been standing.

"Here is the Unborn Q," he said and pulled the screen away.

WITH tremendous fascination the two helpless men looked. A man was sitting on a chair there, facing in their direction.

He sat coolly looking at them in return—a figure above the usual height, clad in a silk costume like Ku Sui's, but of light blue. Even at casual glance he would have been noticed in any crowd, but the keen eyes fastened on him saw details, important things, and their observations were tinged with dark foreboding.

His head was well shaped and unusually large, and so was his strong straight nose and firm chin. His hair was dark brown, but his eyebrows and eyelashes, incongruously, were yellowish, toward the tint of Hawk Carse's own flaxen ones and with a bushiness

reminiscent of the German, Geinst's. And set well in under these eyebrows was a pair of inscrutable green eyes.

His wrists were loosely bound with wire. The faintest of smiles lit the man's features.

"I measured you two while you were unconscious," Ku Sui said excitedly, "and I have compared heights. This Unborn Q is exactly the average of all the heights of the men of whom he is the composite. But the averaging does not seem to be consistent all along. Note his eyebrows, which resemble Geinst's in shape, and note his curious green eyes, much like mine but with a trace of admixed color. His present mood seems to be his prevailing one, a cross between that of Carse and my own. Would you like to test him?"

The Eurasian waited, smiling, for a response. Leithgow spoke up, hesitatingly and a little tremulously.

"I hope you will excuse me, sir, but . . . you will understand the tremendous interest it would have for me."

He waited. Low and sharp came the one word:

"Speak."

"Thank you," the scientist said. "Now, it wouldn't be a test to ask you to reveal some secret memory present in my mind, so perhaps you will be so good as to bring to light one of which I am at this moment unconscious."

He waited. No single thing showed that the composite might be thinking, but after a moment he said:

"Yes. When I was a little boy—when you were—when I was—" For a moment Q stopped, confused, unable to go on; but then he seemed to make a decision. "When I was a little boy I once went exploring in an abandoned building and found written on the wall something which I read with terror. I have never told anybody about this. The words were, 'I could kill you.' "

Leithgow gaped with astonishment.

"That's true!" he cried. "That's true! I haven't thought of that for years!"

Ku Sui smiled triumphantly. He turned to Carse.

"Would you perhaps like to look at Q's forehead?" he asked.

The adventurer fixed glacial eyes on his taunting enemy. Under any other circumstances a meaningful reference to foreheads would have sent him into a cold and dangerous rage. It was known that he had once been trapped by five men, and only those five had ever seen what lay behind the bangs which from that year always covered his forehead. Two of the five he had met again, and they were dead. Ku Sui was said to have been a third.

Carse turned to the composite.

"May I?" he asked, in his voice a little of Leithgow's courtesy, conspicuous by contrast with Ku Sui's attitude of callous superiority.

"You may," said Q.

He walked softly forward. For a moment he looked, and his face whitened a little, and then he returned to his place along the wall. He said nothing.

Ku Sui laughed tauntingly.

"Now one important part of you, at least, will live on faintly," he said.

AFTER the words a new attitude of decision and energy came over the Eurasian. He snapped his fingers.

"Enough of this," he said abruptly to his two prisoners. "It has pleased me to show you how completely I have triumphed. But I have much to do. My plans are tremendous in scope. I must get on with them. Now, I am afraid, I must ring down the final curtain."

Carse stood with head slightly lowered, his cold eyes burning upward at

his hated enemy. He had never stopped watching and thinking. This no doubt was to be the end. If he were to act at all it must be now. Two guns were already on him, but at the best second he would make a desperate rush for Ku Sui, and at least would die in motion.

Ku Sui was not quite finished.

"I have long promised myself the great pleasure of having fun with you, Carse, at the final curtain," he said. "I should still like to; I should give days to the fun; but this sudden and enormous broadening of my power overwhelms me with work which must be done at once; and then, to tell the truth, I am a little afraid. You are the slipperiest man who has ever lived. I no longer dare leave you out of my sight. So, well, here then our long feud comes to an end."

Eyes glittering, he reached under his blouse.

Carse, completely motionless till then, began the infinitesimally brief process of deciding to rush—but he never completed it. In that split second a voice from one side spat out:

"Don't, Carse!"

It was Q. He still sat where he was, and the expression on his face had changed little, but his green eyes, now, gleamed ominously. Ku Sui, a raygun in his hand, turned to the composite.

"He was about to rush me?" he asked, "—and you read his mind? Oh, incomparable Q!"

Q stood up.

"Yes, Ku Sui," he said quietly, "and I can read your mind too."

The Eurasian was taken slightly aback.

"Why—what do you mean?" he asked.

Q walked softly to the table where Leithgow's elaborate equipment set lay out.

"I mean I can read your mind too," Q repeated in the same quiet voice, and with both hands pulled from a compartment a number of strips of film. He counted them. "Nine," he said. "And this one is mine," he added, finding one other.

Suddenly he plunged them into a jar of acid.

"Now all the sound records have been destroyed," he said. "No more men will be made with those strips."

Ku Sui's face was tigerish. With both hands Q picked up an iron stand.

"Q!" the Eurasian screamed. "What are you doing! Stop that!"

IMPERTURBABLY, with half a dozen sweeps of his whole body, Q smashed into hopeless ruins the tubes and delicate wiring at the heart of the apparatus.

"And now you will make no more Q's," he said, "—for you do not know the set-up of the apparatus. Only Leithgow there, and the Leithgow which is part of me, knows that."

Ku Sui stood helpless, locked in a tangled confusion of fierce emotions. Q approached him.

"Give me that raygun," he said quietly.

"Stand back or I'll shoot!" Ku Sui screamed.

"You forget that I can read your mind," said Q. "You will not shoot. You need me, for we have much work to do together. But right now you are being foolish. Give me that gun."

"No! No!" cried out Ku Sui, and backed a few steps.

"Give me that gun!" cried Q in a sudden white fury of passion. Never would the two bound men have imagined there could be such intensity; never had Leithgow felt such sudden fear.

The Eurasian wavered. For a mo-

ment he stood still, torn and wretched, and then, defeated, he handed Q the gun.

Q received it, held it easily in the left hand of the bound pair, and took one more step toward the Eurasian. Again his eyes blazed.

"You most contemptible cur!" he thundered. "I detest you!

He turned to the two astounded prisoners.

"My breast is full of bitterness and hate," he explained quietly, his whole face working. "Which of the nine men in me contributed this? Not you, Leithgow, and little, you, Carse, I think. You may go to the five men we know of, imprisoned in the room. Take them back to Earth. Go also to Ban and Friday and Dr. Warren. I—I do not wish to hurt you. Not any of you."

He paused, and his hands lifted, and the thumb sides stroked down over his forehead. He had no bangs, but this was the gesture of the Hawk!—as close as might be with bound wrists.

"I am confused," he said dazedly. "Pulled this way and that. I am nine men, with the minds and memories and urges of all nine. I—I—I have existed only about half an hour."

He stood uncertainly.

"I feel so strange. I am you, Carse, and you, Leithgow." He turned to Ku Sui. "And even you, you unspeakable rat!"

Again he stood still; seemed again confused.

"I can be powerful," he said darkly. "I feel tremendous urges. And I am evil!"—here he turned again to Ku Sui —"and that is from you!"

He advanced on him.

"So you thought I would be your instrument, you rat! You bound me, you crowed over me, you patronized me as master toward slave—I, I, who have the most tremendous potential of any man who has ever walked the face of any planet! I am terrible in power, and I am terrible, I fear, in evil, for you, *you,* are in me, and I detest you and I detest myself!"

The two robot-coolies caught his eye.

"Out," he ordered. "Up the ladder of the land entrance. Go west on the lake shore till you come to a boat, half-buried in the sand. A hundred yards in the jungle you will find an aircar. Bring it to me. Go!"

The robot-coolies left. Q turned to Ku Sui and again advanced on him.

"Out, you!" he cried again. "Up the ozi stump!"

Ku Sui, beaten and cringing, backed from him—backed all the way to the radio room door, and ominously the Unborn Q followed him.

"I shall use you, detestable rat!" he thundered. "I shall not kill you, as you deserve, but shall keep you near me, my slave and my dog, to be tortured and sneered at and used. Monstrous things stir in me, and in monstrous things you should be useful. To the stump!" Hands still tied, he passed out of the room.

For a moment Carse and Leithgow looked wordless at each other and did not move; but then the Hawk leaped toward the radio room. Slowly, awkwardly with his tied hands, he worked the controls of the visi-screen, while Leithgow looked on over his shoulder.

It was night. One brother planet, alone among a thousand stars, showed on the screen. In the darkness the four figures were lost.

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Scientific

EXPLORERS AGREE THAT THE FARTHER ONE TRAVELS INTO AMAZON JUNGLES THE **LIGHTER** BECOMES THE SKIN OF THE NATIVE INDIANS. THE **MASKIS** TRIBE IN WAIKANO TERRITORY HAVE LIGHT SKINS AND LONG SKULLS . .

WM. M. MCGOVERN IN HIS "JUNGLE PATHS *and* INCA-RUINS" INSISTS THAT THE DARK SKINNED AMAZON INDIANS **TABOO** MATING WITH THE LIGHT **MASKIS** SPECIES, WHOM THEY DESPISE .

TOTEM POLES ARE THE **HISTORY** PAGES OF INDIAN LONG LOST PAST; A RECORD OF THE **TRIBE** WHO DESIGNS AND BUILDS THEM .

SCIENCE IS ESTABLISHING CORRECT RECORDS OF THE DEAD PAST BY **DISCOVERING** NEW FACTS OF THE MESOZOIC WORLD; **RECORDS** OF DRAGONS THAT ROAMED THE SWAMPS OF WYOMING BEFORE MAN'S EXISTENCE.

Mysteries

THE WHITE RACE—DOES IT EXIST?

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

When we speak of the races of earth, is there really such a race as the white race? Is the color of a man's skin indicative of his origin?

THERE is no subject upon which more scientific nonsense, or rather let us say nonsense purporting to be science, has been written than upon the subject of race. The reason is not hard to find. Each man prefers his own type and considers his to be the highest. It is a subject which is more bound up with emotion than with reason, and the average man is still essentially an emotional animal.

Since the start of history, the question of a desirable racial type has run through as many fashions as women's clothes. The Germans, in preferring blonds, are not the first peoples to set a racial style. The Mayans admired slanting foreheads (and strangely enough, their ironed-out foreheads, done in infancy, did not affect their intelligence), the Incas admired large ears, certain African tribes large lips, the Turks once admired excess fat and the Medieval artists thought excessively long necks were desirable.

The ideas of race which were popular during the days of our fathers, are at present giving place to other standards of differentiation. If the tendency continues to its inevitable conclusion, we are going to discover that there is no such thing as a white race. For the standards of color by which our parents learned to classify mankind are far too superficial for the most advanced anthropologists. Today the scientists are busy pointing out that skeletal differences are far more important than the shade of the subject's skin.

Modern science regards the white, yellow, black, red and brown, even when the latter is eliminated or classified with the red as a subgroup under the yellow, with profound distrust. Thus the deeper structural differences are leading the foremost thinkers to suspect the old classifications so strongly that they are going out of fashion in any scientific discussions worthy of the name.

For example, Huntington contends that skin-color is now distributed over the earth's surface according to the strength of the sun's rays, and is only man's reaction to his environment. Dixon of Harvard University, argues that all men are to be divided by skeletal differences into round-heads with narrow noses, round-heads with broad noses, long-heads with narrow noses, etc., completely ignoring hair-texture and the color of the skin. Both of these eminent scientists have agreed that the negro is not a primitive, but a recently-evolved tropical type. In other words, a group of the long heads, finding themselves in a tropical environment, evolved the spreading nostrils, thicker skull and blacker skin of the negro. Thus the negro is a late adaptation of Modern Man to a tropical environment.

NOW it is interesting to note that mankind may be divided into two rather distinct types which are called "harmonics." One is a long-headed, long-faced, individual with long eye-sockets. The hair in cross-section is inclined to be very oval, thus giving it a tendency to curl. The type is the Ancient Egyptian. Let us call him the "proto-negroid" because in its extremity, the type becomes more negroid, the hair becoming exaggeratedly curly, etc The negro is a late branch from the type. In its earlier form, the skin is a tan shade and the eyes are long and deep-sunken, the nose delicate, the lips not too full. The stature is slight and slender. The hands and feet slender and delicate.

The "proto-negroid" is sometimes called the "ancient longhead" and sometimes called the Mediterranean Race. This latter name is somewhat incorrect, for though the people are to be found in the Mediterranean, they are centered in the area of the Indian Ocean. A better name for them would be the "Peoples of the Sea," for they are found upon every ancient shore-line.

In London, for example, when dredging for a new building, in the lowest basement, while digging in the gravels in which are to be found the remains of the Great English Channel forest which once covered that submerged valley, the human skulls which are brought up are the true type of the ancient long-headed "People of the Sea."

Again in the channel islands of California, when the earliest skulls are unearthed, they are once more the harmonic long-head. A map of the cephalic-index of living populations today would reveal that the long-heads would live along the sea-coasts, with the expection of the western coast of the Americas where round-heads have displaced the ancient long-headed population.

The other "harmonic" type is the round-headed, round-faced Asian with round eye-sockets and straight hair which is in the cross section completely round. In the extremity this type develops the mongoloid eye-fold and becomes the typical Chinese.

These round-heads are concentrated most thickly in the region just north of the Himalayas. From here they pour in a thick stream from the Caspian into the Mediterranean and through Greece and Albania into Europe. Another arm runs northward through Russia into the Baltic while a third stream sweeps northeast across the Aleutian Islands and down the western coast of the Americas. Thus from the map of present distribution, it is easy to see that the round-head is an Asian and a landsman.

NOW where does white man enter this picture? Is he a cross? We learn with surprise that his is not a true or a harmonic type. Between the poles of the long-headed proto-negroid, and the round-headed Asian, in headform, shape of the face, eye-sockets and cross-section of the hair, varies that section of Modern Man which we designate as the "White Race." The variation is so profound that not only do we see all combinations within the same nationality, but often within the same family group.

These facts force us to one of two conclusions Either the white race is a very profound cross which has never remained in isolation long enough or inbred deeply enough to set its type, or it is the original stem from which the other two harmonics branched.

To meet these facts, some ingenious classifications have been offered. For example, there is Duckworth, who would make the round-heads the general type from which the long-heads, making their way into the Indian ocean and spreading from this point, were an early branch. However, that of Wissler* seems to be the most logical. He would make White Man and perhaps also the Polynesian Race the original stem. As he points out, the White Man is the most hairy of all the races and this is certainly a primitive characteristic.

When studying the very ancient nations it is important for us to keep in mind the characteristic of facial hair. It is anthropological nonsense for us to classify the beardless Egyptians and Cretans as "White Men" It would be more honest for us of the white race to admit that the first civilizations were not founded by men of our race, but by the tan-skinned "Peoples of the Sea," some of whom, nevertheless, have contributed to the blood of the modern European

As for this matter of superiority, the honors for geniuses are so evenly divided between the two harmonics that one could not truthfuly give the palm to either the one type or the other. It would be a controversial question, for example, whether the round-headed Beethoven and Socrates were any greater than the long-headed Wagner and Shakespeare. And I would venture to wager that the honors in the prisons are just as evenly divided! Apparently the only fair judge of potential intelligence is brain capacity in proportion to the frame, for much brain-space is taken up in mere muscle-control.

AS FOR blondness, it is a stumbling block, for it is to be found in Northern Europe among both round- and long-heads. Dixon suggests that there may be something about the food grown in this soil, or some other physical reason which might contribute to fair hair and pale skin. However, the blonds to be found among the San Blas Indians of Colombia are a denial to this theory of Dixon. The Indians have their own names for their whites. Significantly they are called "ya pisas" or "hairy ones." Sometimes they are nicknamed "moon-children" in reference to the fact that white is the color sacred to the moon.

It is interesting to know that these blond Indians exist by the thousands. Some were taken to the Smithsonian Institute to be studied by the scientists. One of the most interesting facts to be discovered was that about one third of their words come from the ancient Norse. After realizing that these Indians did not have the white hair and pink eyes of the true albinoes, but blue eyes and various shades of golden hair, the scientists decided that they were partial albinoes One sage expressed the opinion that the San Blas tribe was in the process of changing its racial type and that the proceeding would have gone much further if an abnormal hatred for the conquering Spaniard had not caused the blonds to be placed under a marriage taboo. (This fact was attested to by the Indians themselves)

The designation that the blonds were partial-albinoes is an interesting one. The question which naturally arises is, if these people with their various shades of light hair and fair skin, are to be scientifically classified as partial-albinoes, what are white Europeans? What is white man in

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* *Wissler, Clark—Curator of Anthropology, Amer. Museum of Nat. Hist., New York City. —Ed.*

general? Is he a partial-albino? Is white skin to be considered as various degrees of partial-albinism? And if so, was this a general condition of the original stem along with a tendency to body-hair, from which diverging types acquired a more hairless skin and a deeper color?

What do you think?

THE END

ELECTION CAMPAIGN ON SATURN

(Concluded from page 57)

who crawled hesitantly and fearfully into the magnate's office were the unhappiest creatures in space.

Jaxon looked up from his desk as they tip-toed in timidly.

"B-boss," began Willie, with a plaintive sob in his voice, "honest, boss, we didn't do nothin' wrong. It ain't our fault, boss."

Jaxon jumped up and rushed across the room.

"Boys!" he shouted gaily, smiling broadly, "I'm delighted to see you. Sit down, have a drink!"

"Huh?" Willie clutched a lamp for support. Even Joey gaped open-mouthed in astonishment, then his eyes switched to the fat Venusian cigar in Jaxon's hand.

"Boys, this is the best thing you ever did," Jaxon chuckled, thrusting glasses into their hands.

"Bub-bub-but Ysuol ain't elected," stammered Willie, his head whirling.

"Exactly! And I'm glad! The cheap swindling rat sold out to BascOLar a week ago. And I'd already paid him for those mines—ahem! - that is, I'd already contributed to his campaign. The swine deserved defeat. That's why I didn't do anything when I discovered the sign was turning around backwards."

Willie shook his head, still bewildered. "But Melko was elected, and he sold out to BascOLar too."

JAXON leaned back in his seat and roared with mirth, his whole body shaking violently. "Haha, I'm not caught napping all the time. As soon as that crook Ysuol went over to BascOLar, I had a little talk with Melko and finally convinced him that he ought to accept a bri— hem! er, that is, a small token of my good will. Cost me ten million, but I got the mines. I'll make ten times ten million! What a fine man Melko is, how upright and cooperative!"

"Then you ain't sore at us, boss?" cried Willie eagerly. "We ain't goin' back to the mines?"

"Back to the mines?" exclaimed Jaxon, amazed. "You two geniuses? Of course not. In fact, I want to give you both a gift. What do you want, Willie? Just name it."

Willie swallowed. Through his mind raced a vision of unending torrents of *trtzina* pouring down his gullet. He braced himself and spoke. "Boss, how about a hundred thousand bucks?"

"Yes sir!" Jaxon snatched a checkbook from a drawer and scrawled quickly. "Here, Willie, my boy, you deserve this. Take six months off to enjoy it. Joey, what would you like?"

Joey did not stir. Willie jabbed him savagely in the ribs. "Wake up, idiot, the boss is talkin' to you."

Joey started. "Wazzat?"

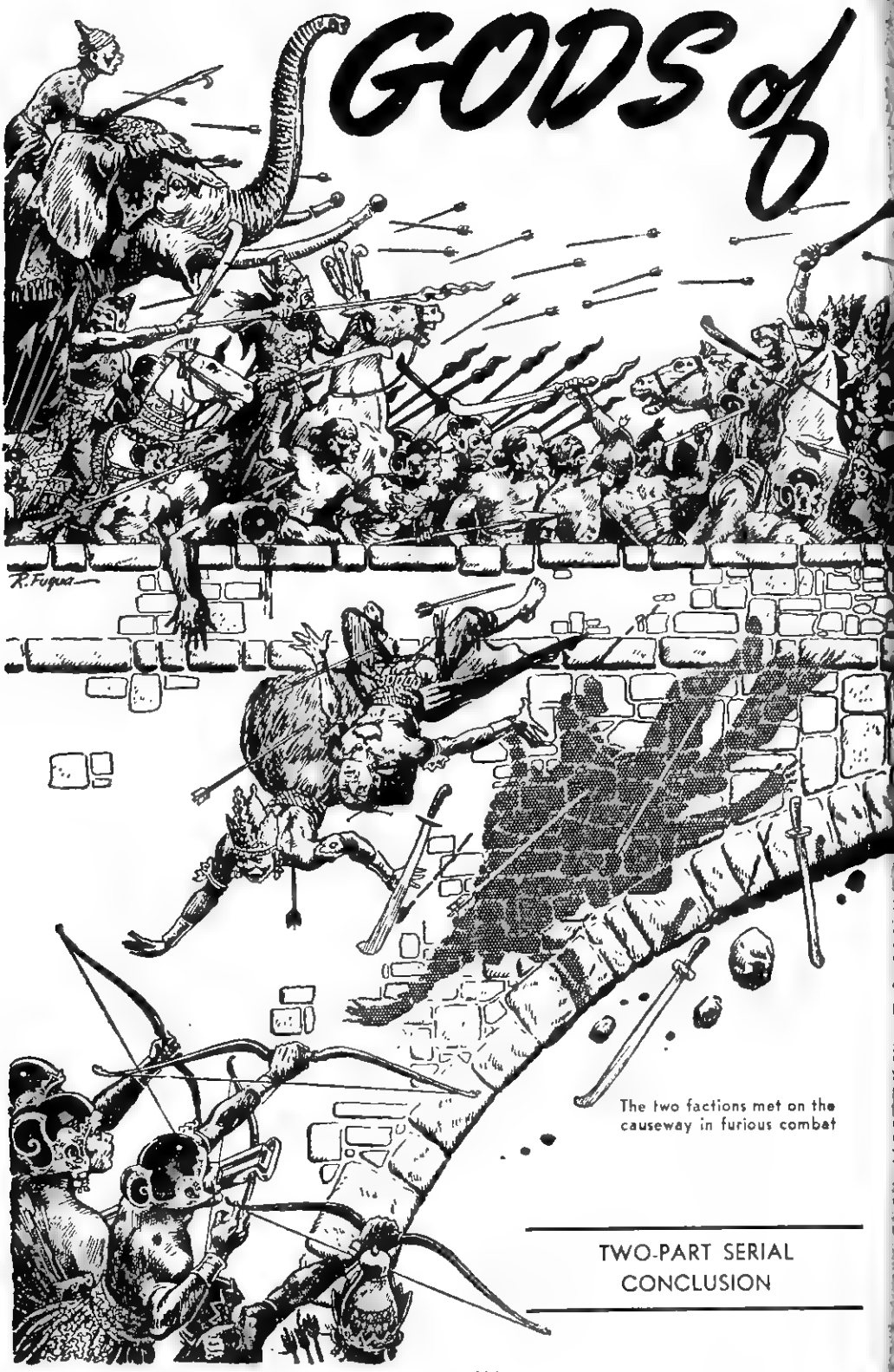
"Joey, I'm giving you a gift. Anything you want."

Joey stared a moment, then slowly a great smile spread across his face. In his eyes a great light shone. In his bosom a great hope dawned.

He spoke huskily. "Anythin'?"

Jaxon nodded. "Anything."

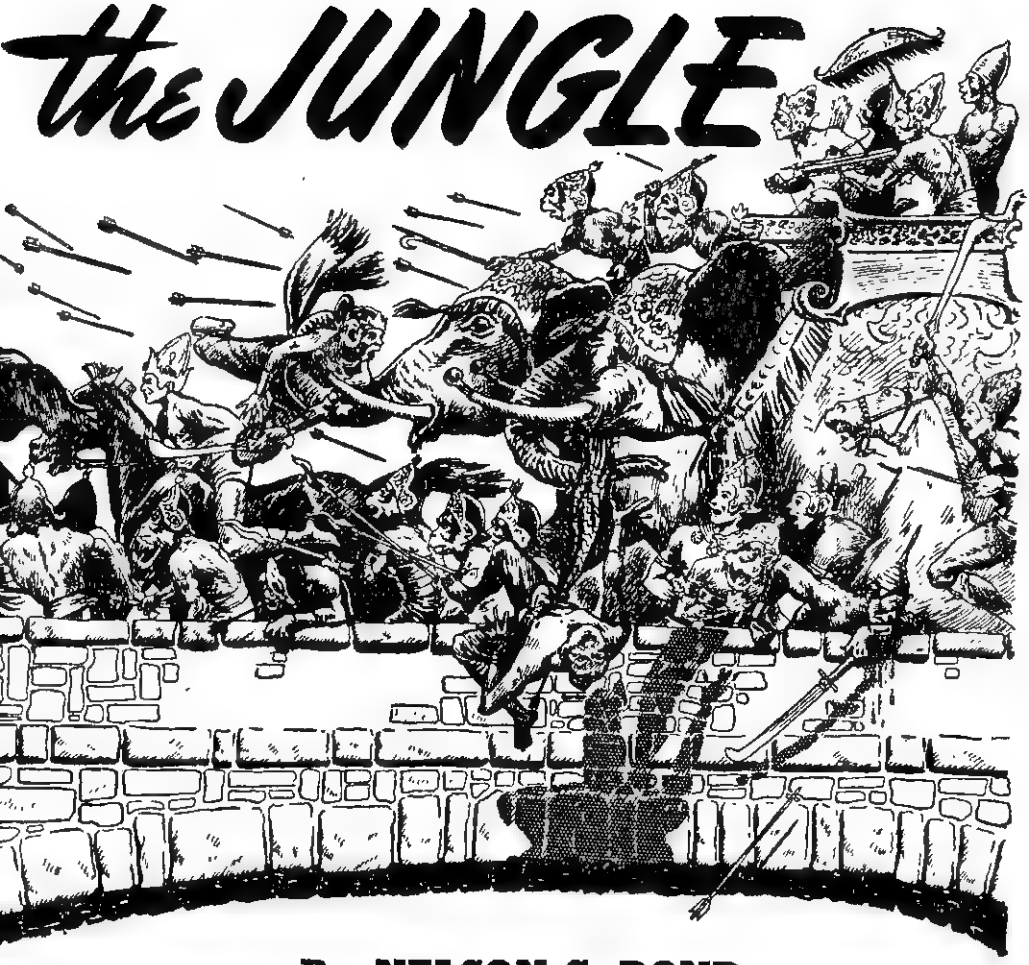
"Then please, boss, please gimme a couple of them Venusian cigars!"



The two factions met on the causeway in furious combat

TWO-PART SERIAL
CONCLUSION

the JUNGLE



By NELSON S. BOND

What was the terrible secret of ancient Angkor? What was the power of the mysterious weapon that Ramey Winters found in the time chamber?

Synopsis of Part One

AFTER a hectic air battle with Japanese planes, young American airmen RAMEY WINTERS and BOB ("Red") BARRETT, flying for the Chinese Republican Army in defense of the Burma Road, crash at Angkor, Cambodia, French Indo-China. They are rescued by a party of archaeologists engaged in studying the majestic temple, Angkor Vat.

Dr. IAN AIKEN, leader of the expedition, attempts to prevent capture of the pair by Japanese troops by masquerading them as members of his party, which includes the twin brothers, LAKE and SYDNEY O'BRIEN, JOHNNY GRINNELL, Dr. Aiken's daughter SHEILA, two native assistants, SIRABHAR and TOMASAKI, and many laborers.

However, upon the arrival of the Nipponese, Ramey and Red are betrayed. A battle ensues, in the course of which Grinnell and Sirabhar are slain. The others, taking with them an aged Buddhist priest, SHENG-TI, escape to a subterranean chamber discovered by Lake. Within this

room is one of the weirdest of all Angkor Vat's many mysteries, a gigantic cube made of a metal unknown to man, presumably wrought by the ancients.

By chance, Barrett succeeds in opening the cube. As the group crowds in to examine the interior, they are again betrayed by the traitor, Tomasaki, who clamps shut the door and runs to inform the enemy as to their whereabouts. Attempting to reopen the portal, Ramey Winters depresses a lever setting the machine into motion. When it stops, they find they have been hurled 5,000 years backward through Time to the period of Angkor's greatness.

Debouching from the time machine into the belly of a hollow idol in the main altar room, the explorers are instrumental in preventing the sacrifice of a charming maid, EVAVNE, but in so doing gain the enmity of the giant Lord, RAVANA.

Taken before the governor of Chitrakuta, ancient name of Angkor, they find themselves confronting a man human in all respects save that his skin is blue! They learn from the blue lord, SUGRIVA, that he is not of Earth at all, but a peaceful bearer-of-culture from Earth's sister planet, Venus, known as Gaanel.

The Lord Ravana, his sister RAKSHASI and brother VIBHISHANA are interlopers from the planet Videlia—Mars—whose desire it is to subjugate the people of Earth. Superstitious awe of Ramey and fear of a weapon, the Bow of Rudra, which he found in the time-machine, restrains the Videlian chief, who masks his hatred for Sugriva and contempt of the blue lord's ape-warriors, captained by the anthropoid, KOHRISAN.

The Lady Rakshasi lures Ramey to her apartment, there traps him into denying his godhood. Immediately thereafter the Videlians depart from Chitrakuta, stealing the dreaded Bow of Rudra. Nor is this all. Syd O'Brien tells Ramey morbidly:

"When Ravana and his gang pulled out of here before dawn this morning, they not only took with them the Bow of Rudra. They also—kidnaped Sheila!"

★ ★ ★

PART TWO

CHAPTER XI

The Isle of Slaves

"SHEILA!" cried Ramey Winters. "Sheila—kidnapped! But Ravana wouldn't dare! And why should he—?" He stopped suddenly, the full and terrible import of Syd's words dawning upon him. Again he seemed to hear the soft voice of the Lady Rakshasi purring in his ears. "*'Thou and I, my Lord . . . sweeping all others before us. Nor shall we stand alone. For, lo—there is even my brother Ravana, whose heart hungers after the goddess Sheilacita . . .'*"

And Ramey saw, now, the full price he was paying for one careless slip of the tongue last night. So long as he and his companions were considered gods by the superstitious Videlians, none would have dared lay a hand on any of them. But he had dispelled that illusion, and the bold Ravana, aware at last that it was only men with whom he had to deal, had moved toward the accomplishment of his ambitions.

Ramey's fists knotted at his sides. He cried harshly, "Well, what are we waiting for? After them! Sugriva—surely you know which way they went?"

"Without a doubt," admitted the blue lord of Chitrakuta, "to Ravana's island stronghold of Lanka. And—Kohrisan *was* organizing a company to pursue them. But now he cannot."

"Cannot? Why not?"

"The Bow! Did you not say the Bow had been stolen?"

"Yes, but—"

"If Ravana turns it against us," declared the Gaanelian sombrely, "then are we all destroyed. And the plight of

Sheila Aiken is an hundredfold worse."

"But the Bow ain't working," pointed out Red Barrett swiftly. "Ramey and me tried it out. Nothing happened."

Sugriva turned to the young airman eagerly. "Is this true, Ramey Winters?"

Ramey nodded. "I told you about it, my lord, remember? And you said it was just as well it wasn't operating. I pressed all the triggers, or grips, or whatever they are, but nothing happened. Nothing that Red and I could see, anyway. As a matter of fact, we couldn't even figure out what was supposed to happen."

Sugriva said, "You would have seen, my friend, had a charge fueled the Bow. I know not where you made this experiment, but believe me, had its chamber been munitioned, every living thing within range of the Bow's tremendous arc would have instantly withered and flamed in sudden death. Never in the world was there ever a more terrible weapon than that invented by my brother Rudra."

Red said, "You mean the Bow is a sort of a—a heatray, or something?"

"You might call it that," agreed the blue lord. "It might more accurately be termed a projector of *cold* heat."

"Cold heat?" snorted Lake O'Brien. "That's r h e t o r i c a l jabberwocky! Sounds like 'dark light'!"

DR. AIKEN raised a thoughtful head. "Yes, Lake, but don't forget—there *is* such a thing as dark light. Rays that span distances invisible, and remain unseen until they touch the object upon which they are focussed. I can conceive of a cold heat which might be similar. A fierce, burning ray which does not expend its force until it touches the living object on which it has been aimed. Is this what you mean, Sugriva?"

The blue lord nodded. "Exactly, my friend. But not necessarily must the Bow be aimed at its target. Whatever it touches, that it consumes. Once—" His eyes clouded and he shook his head sorrowfully— "once, some decades ago when our colonies were first established, we were constrained to employ force against a camp of rebel Earthlings who seized and held one of our citadels. The destruction was—horrible. The entire fortress was seared clean of life. The very stones in the walls melted and ran together."

The maid Evavne spoke. "Yes, my lords, the governor Sugriva speaks truly. This happened even in my own land. There on a lifeless hill still stands the molten fortress, desolate and parched as if stricken by the lightnings."*

Ramey Winters was chafing with inactivity. Now he growled, "All right! But even granting the Bow is a frightful weapon, why should that stop us if it is not charged?"

"That is just the point," Sugriva told him. "It may be charged by now. There is no doubt but that the lord Ravana knows the manner of its fueling."

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* "The wrath of Azuria, because the other peoples of this earth would not turn blue to suit her . . . In the vitrified forts of a few parts of Europe we find data that the Humes and Gibbons have disregarded. The vitrified forts surrounding England . . . the vitrified forts of Scotland, Ireland, Brittany and Bohemia.

"Or that, once upon a time, with electric blasts, Azuria tried to swipe this earth clear of the peoples who resisted her. The whitish, or yellowish, or brownish peoples of Scotland, Ireland, Brittany . . . built forts, or already had forts, on hilltops. Something poured electricity upon them. The stones of these forts exist to this day, vitrified or melted and turned to glass.

"The stones of these forts are vitrified in no reference to cementing them . . . they are cemented here and there, in streaks, as if special blasts had struck, or played, upon them . . ." from "The Book of the Damned" by Charles Fort.—Ed.

"Manner? You mean it requires some strange kind of ammunition?"

"Even so. That which must be fed into the operating chambers is a rare and obscure metal. I doubt that in all Chitrakuta there is sufficient of this precious element to charge the Bow a single time. But Ravana, having plotted this move for a long time, will have secretly stored fuel to gorge its lethal maw. We have no way of knowing, of course. But it would be suicidal to move against Ravana until we *do* know."

Red grunted, "Then we've got to find out, that's all! If he ain't got ammunition for the Bow, we've got to close in on him. If he has, somehow we got to get the Bow back. That right, Ramey?"

But it was not Ramey who answered. The reply sprang from an unexpected source. From the *bonze,* Sheng-ti, who now moved forward thoughtfully

THIS was a different Sheng-ti from him who had eked out a squalid existence in the labyrinths of Angkor Vat. The elderly priest was clean. erect; eyes which had once veiled lurking mists of insanity now gleamed with shrewd reason.

"I am a man of peace, O my friends," he said. "Yea, even a priest of the very God of Peace. Yet much have I seen and learned in this strange world, much thought since my brain was swept clear of its fog by the lord Sugriva.

"And methinks the Way of Peace, which is the way of the lord Sugriva, now trembles under the blows of the Way of Darkness. Surely my Lord Buddha would advise that in a time like this a man must make a choice.

"So—mark ye! The Lord Ravana knows me not. I have been hid from his sight throughout the days of our stay here. My skin is yellow as that of the natives of these parts. Is there not some way in which I might gain entrance to Ravana's stronghold and there, perchance, regain the stolen weapon?"

Sugriva said slowly, "That might be possible. Yes . . . it *is* possible . . ."

"Where is this Isle of Lanka?" demanded Ramey hotly.

"Not far from here. But a few hours' journey. It is a tiny island securely situated in the center of a great lake which lies to the south."

"Tonlé Sap!" cried Lake O'Brien with sudden comprehension. "That's the only great lake around these parts!" But Ramey was still pressing the ruler of Chitrakuta breathlessly.

"Your people are artists in many ways, my lord. Say, do they not also know the art of disguise? You have paints and pigments. Can you not darken my skin, make me seem like a wanderer from the Indies, and let me accompany Sheng-ti?"

Sugriva nodded. "Yes, it could be done, my son."

Dr. Aiken cried, "But, no, Ramey! We need you here with us. Let Sheng-ti go alone—"

"I got us into this mess," gritted Ramey, "and it's up to me to get us out again. There's no use talking, Doc, I've made up my mind. The rest of you stay here and plan a campaign against Lanka. Sheng-ti and I are going to get the Bow—and Sheila!"

THUS it was that before the sultry tropic sun hung high in the heavens, two seeming native coolies shuffled down the road that stretched beside the grey and greasy Siem-Reap to the lake called Tonlé Sap. Scuffed sandals shod their feet, loose hats of woven rush shadowed their faces, and the rudest of garments, tattered and begrimed, hung from their shoulders. Only, hot

and heavy next to his skin, concealed by the folds of his coolie wrapper, Ramey Winters felt the reassuring bulk of an Army automatic; sole note, in this strange, forgotten world, of a civilization left behind —a civilization not yet born.

The scenery about him was not unfamiliar. The slow years work few changes in areca and coconut. Great, writhing diptocarpus trees flung air-roots ten feet in diameter across laboring branches; the sluggish river swelled into stagnant pools aflame with hyacinth and lily; from the all-engulfing jungle whispered the furtive sounds of hotland life. Once a mild, incurious water buffalo rose, snorting, from its muddy wallow to watch their passage; once a gaunt crane rose before them, lifting awkwardly on wings that flailed the sodden air as if too weak to bear their burden.

The scenery was not unfamiliar — save in one respect. The road on which they walked. It was not the typical baked-clay road of the Cambodia Ramey Winters had known. It was a broad and well-paved highway, sturdy enough to bear even the transport of a highly mechanized era. Treading its solid surface, Ramey marveled aloud, as oft before, that such a civilization should have been lost to man's very memory in the mists of time.

"I can't understand, Sheng-ti, what can have brought this great Gaanelian culture to an end. These roads . . . those mighty temples at Chitrakuta . . . the city itself! Why, it is a city of millions!"

The aged bonze said quietly, "The jungle is life-in-death, my friend. It is the mother who destroys her young."

"I know, but—"

"Let Man desert his cities for a decade," said Sheng-ti sombrely, "and the jungles will reclaim her own. The hardy grass will shatter these roads, impervious to wheel and boot. The tendril will bruise the rock, the soft shoot bring ruin to walls which withstand the battering-ram. Thus ever Nature reclaims such little space as Man borrows for his brief moment."

Ramey said, "I guess you're right. It doesn't take long either, does it? Even in our young country, the United States, we have ghost-towns. Abandoned cities, now overgrown with weeds, already crumbling into decay." And then, because his soldier instincts always lay closer to the front of his mind than any other, his thoughts returned to the main problem confronting them. "What I can't see is just what we're going to do about Ravana, anyway. If that bodyguard is any sample of his army, he has a tough force to overcome. Giants, every one of them. And Sugriva's 'militia' is nothing but a few, scantily-armed companies of trained apes!"

THE Buddhist priest glanced at him searchingly. "I should not dismiss them so lightly, Ramey Winters."

"But that's all they are! Monkeys masquerading as men. Talking baboons, dressed in mens' clothing—"

His companion made a swift, indecipherable gesture. It might have been one of annoyance; it might have held some unknown religious symbolism. His voice was sharp, reproving.

"You know not whereof you speak, child of a younger culture! Hark ye! We of China are old; much lore had we forgotten before your white-skinned forebears built their first hopeful empire. In our ancient annals are tales . . . legends of those jungle-bred warriors you call 'ape-men.' And great is the honor our elders paid to them. The *Chu-King* tells of a day when their prowess saved all earth for mankind—"

"Maybe so," said Ramey dubiously, "but they don't look much like fighters to me. Their captain—what's his name?—Kohrisan: a posing little jack-anapes if I ever saw one."

"And what is Man himself," asked Sheng-ti, "but an ape bereft of his tail? No, Ramey Winters, you have not read aright the character of Kohrisan. I have talked with him. I know that beneath that hairy breast, beneath those over-gaudy habiliments, there beats a heart as warmly human as mine—or yours. It was a great thing the governor Sugriva did when he created out of the beasts of the jungle these new men."

It was Ramey's turn to stare. This was something he had not known before. A marvel it had not occurred to him to question.

"Created! Sugriva created—?"

"But, yes; did you not know? Sugriva is a wise man. He realized that the difference between man and the lower ape is slight. And he is a brilliant technician in matters pertaining to the brain. Kohrisan and the troops he leads are jungle creatures educated by Sugriva, given human thought and a knowledge of human tongues by the *vilyishna.** The governor Sugriva's dream brought to fruition . . . a proud, new race of intelligent beings hand-forged from Nature's rawest materials. A race of new men."

"New men!" repeated Ramey. "A race of new men!"

"Yes. But, now—" They had rounded a curve in the road; Sheng-ti's voice assumed a note of warning—"Quiet, my son! For we have come to the ferry-port!"

And Ramey saw that the sluggish stream beside which they walked had now widened, disgorging into a gigantic body of water. Its name he knew. It was the Tonlé Sap, the Great Lake of Indo-China. A tremendous expanse of brazen blue, 70 miles long and fifteen wide. And in its center, secure as if surrounded by barrier walls of steel, nestled a mist-veiled island which Ramey knew must be the stronghold of the Martian lord, Ravana. The citadel isle of Lanka.

BUT scant was the attention he could give this place now. For there was great activity before them. On the shore of the lake, but a few hundred yards distant, were numberless quais and wharves. These landing-docks were aswarm with the warriors of Ravana—and others! Small, frightened Annamese, bewildered little yellow men huddled together in tiny groups—no, not merely huddled! Chained! Chained in long queues, saw Ramey, and being herded into an endless stream of ferries shuttling back and forth across the lake!

He turned to Sheng-ti. "Sugriva was right! Ravana *is* enslaving the natives! These men do not *want* to be taken to Lanka. They're being *forced* there!"

"Quiet!" warned Sheng-ti. A frown creased his forehead; he moved as if to draw Ramey back with him into the shadow of overhanging brush. "This ruins our plan, Ramey Winters. We dare go to Lanka as freemen, but not as slaves—"

His warning, his change of heart, came too late. For interrupting him there came a loud cry from one of the Videlian soldiers. *"Over there! Two more of them!"* And before the pair could move a step, they were surrounded and seized by giant sons of the desert planet.

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* *vilyishna:* A Gaanelian machine which transfers knowledge from one brain to another by rearranging the electrical thought-patterns. See Part One.—Ed.

CHAPTER XII

An Enemy's Life

IT MATTERED little to Ramey Winters that the smallest of the followers of Ravana towered a good head and shoulders above himself. Given a moment's time to prepare for trouble, an opportunity to set himself, he would have gladly matched his wits and strength against that of his captors. If brute power alone were to be considered, neither he nor any Earthman could stand against the giant Videlians. But he had in his belt a Twentieth Century weapon that was, indeed, as the gangsters of Ramey's era had termed it, an "equalizer" . . .

But he did not draw his automatic. The attack was too sudden and too unexpected . . . and by the time he felt hard Videlian hands upon him he did not need the mutely warning glance of Sheng-ti to remind him that this was one time the adage about discretion being the better part of valor well applied.

Meekly he permitted himself to be hauled forward to the quai-side, where waited one apparently captain of those who were shipping the new slaves to Lanka. This one scowled as he eyed the new captives.

"Well," he roared in a voice of thunder, "and how did you two get away?"

It was Sheng-ti who answered, smoothly, calmly, ingratiatingly. "We did not 'get away,' my Lord. We have but just arrived. My friend and I are voyagers from distant Penang, come to seek employment in the establishment of the mighty Lord Ravana, whose fame has reached our ears."

"Employment!" The overseer stared at him blankly for a second. Then his laughter burst in a great guffaw. "You'll find employment, all right! Thalakka —chain these fools with the others!"

The one to whom he spoke, himself an officer of rank to judge by his trappings, said, "Chain them, Seshana?"

"Those were my orders."

"Forgive me, sir, but—do you think that is necessary in this case? These men are not captive slave, being taken to Lanka against their will. They came here of their own volition . . . freely offered their services." Then, hastily, as his superior's brow darkened: "I am returning to the island on the next boat myself, sir. If you wish, I shall see that they are transported thither and turned over to whomever judges such cases."

Seshana said mockingly, "I had not dreamed there was such tenderness within your bosom, Captain Thalakka. Be careful your noble sentiments do not someday send you to languish in the dungeons with that chicken-hearted fool, Vibhishana. But—" He shrugged —"I suppose there's no harm in it. Very well, then. Take them away!"

And he went back to his work with lash and cry as the friendly Videlian led Ramey and Sheng-ti to a boat just preparing to pull out from the wharf. A boatswain cried the command, a dozen oars spidered the surface of the blue water, and the great, awkward transport ferry set forth across the lake. Thus, free men still, but under sufferance only, Ramey and his friend embarked for the island fortress of Ravana.

IT WAS on the journey across the lagoon that Ramey realized for the first time just how great was the problem of defeating the lord Ravana.

His island citadel lay a good four miles from the shore. Four miles which, in an era that knew no motorboats, no

sea-sleds, must necessarily be laboriously traversed in open skiffs propelled by man-power. Even had Ravana not the ammunition wherewith to charge the Bow of Rudra, his archers would find the occupants of invading craft easy prey. And if he had, by now, charged the Bow—

In any event, invasion seemed a complete impossibility. For even should a score, a hundred boatloads of fighters gain the shores of Lanka, the problem still confronted them of gaining entrance to the fortress itself. And as the boat in which they were passengers drew nearer, Ramey saw the high, gray walls of the citadel, the buttressed stanchions lined with watchful warriors, the mighty gates and ramparts, and he knew that never in this world could the ape-soldiers of Sugriva successfully storm this salient.

The single hope remained that he and Sheng-ti could somehow get back the Bow from Ravana. Then battle might not be necessary. Before the threat of its use, the giant leader would be forced to capitulate.

As Ramey pondered thus, Sheng-ti was skillfully prodding the friendly Videlian captain for information that might be of some value. Admiringly he commented on the greatness of the fort toward which they oared. The Martian was pleased.

"It is the mightiest fortress on this strange planet," he boasted pridefully. "Oh, not so strong, perhaps as some on our lovely Videlia. But strong enough to withstand the attack of any enemy *here*. Moreover—" He leaned forward confidentially—"Our lord Ravana has just returned from Chitrakuta with a new and mighty weapon which assures our lasting invulnerability. A magic bow with the power to destroy anything which offends its archer!"

Ramey struggled to mask the eagerness in his eyes, drew an expression of incredulity to his lips.

"A *magic* bow?" he repeated. "How —how know you it is magic? Have you seen it shoot?"

"No-o-o," answered the garrulous Videlian reluctantly. "Not as yet. Our Lord has not seen fit to demonstrate its powers yet. There are certain spells he must cast upon it yet, I understand. But we know its power. Our spies have long time told us—"

RAMEY heaved an inward sigh of relief. Then so far the Martian overlord had not yet found the time, or the ammunition to feed the Bow's lethal chamber. But his moment of relief passed as the Videlian continued.

"Not only that, but we have won to our cause even the very gods of this planet! Know you who returned this morn to Lanka with the lord Ravana? An Earth goddess!"

"Sheila!" cried Ramey.

But fortunately the Videlian misinterpreted his cry. He smiled serenely. "Ah, then she is a goddess of your race?"

Ramey said slowly, "She is . . . of my race . . . yes. And where is this goddess now?"

Captain Thalakka smiled slyly. "Where else but in the apartment next to that of Lord Ravana? They say she and our Lord are to be wed. You hear that, Earthmen? That will convince you that we of Videlia are a superior race, will it not? When your very gods mate with our people?"

It was well he expected no answer, and well he was not looking at Ramey as he spoke. For the young airman's eyes were ablaze with anger, his fists had knotted; he looked very little, at this moment, like the humble laborer he pretended to be. But the trip was almost finished, now, and the boat was

drawing awkwardly into a slip before the citadel of Lanka. Wharf, dock and landing-place were aswarm with bustling figures. Slaves disgorged from their vessels now being driven to their quarters, oarsmen readying for a return trip to the mainland, warriors watching the excitement with amused interest . . . even courtiers looking down from an overhanging balcony on the busy scene below. Captain Thalakka called an order to the boatswain, the craft wheeled slowly, stirred into its slip.

And as it did so, another boat, sliding from an adjacent dock, swung with the stream and began to edge lazily toward their own. In an instant, Ramey saw the danger of collision. He cried, "Look out, there! Hard a-port—!"

His cry came too late. The second craft nudged into them; not violently, but with turgid insistence. The oarsmen were caught off balance; there came the *snap!* of splintering wood as oars shattered like matchsticks, a cry of pain as one rower was rammed brutally into the thwarts. Then another cry . . . a shrill scream of terror . . .

RAMEY whirled just in time to see Captain Thalakka, who had risen in his place, hurtle out of the boat. Asprawl he hit the water, kicking, flailing frantically.

Ramey's first impulse was to laugh. Captain Thalakka was far from an imposing figure *now*. Dripping like a rain-drenched rat, he came up spluttering. And then—

Went down again! With a bubbling cry of fear!

The laughter died on Ramey's lips as, glancing about him swiftly, he saw that not a companion of Thalakka's had moved a muscle to help their brother-at-arms! Instead, their faces were as pallid as that of the struggling man . . . and every one of them seemed to shrink from doing anything to help.

It took but a word from Sheng-ti to clarify the situation. The single word, "Drowning! He's drowning, Ramey!"

And suddenly Ramey realized that, incredible as it sounded to an Earthman, this was the absolute truth! Thalakka was a Martian, born of a race whose planet had long been wellnigh waterless, a race whose sluggish canals barely supplied sustenance to the few, hardy plants that sucked their moisture. And the Videlians did not know how to swim! Even in a situation like this, where an Earth child could have paddled his way to safety in the twinkling of an eye, Captain Thalakka's life was in deadly peril!

To think, with Ramey Winters, was to act. It barely mattered that Thalakka was of another race, aye, even of another world. In a flash, the young Earthman was on his feet; then, with a splash, he was diving after the submerged body of the Martian.

His hands, groping for a hold, found Thalakka at the same moment the Videlian's frantic clutch found him. Desperate arms wrapped around his neck, engulfing, swaddling him, choking the breath from his lungs. The Martian's weight was like a leaden anchor, dragging him to the bottom. But there came to Ramey memory of lifesaving drill learned in a college. Instinctively his hands did the proper thing.

Right hand *so* —on Thalakka's left elbow. Left hand *thus,* on the Martian's right wrist. A twist . . . a shrug . . . and he was behind the Martian, treading water, holding the other man's right arm in a straining hammerlock, gulping in great life-giving draughts of air.

AFTER that, his task was simple. With the Martian's face cupped

in his left hand, he kicked out strongly for the boat. Sheng-ti was at the boat-side to grip his burden, lift him over the thwarts. And seconds later, rescued and rescuer were being put safely ashore, ears dinning under the cascading roars of an excited group of onlookers.

Then it was that Captain Thalakka turned to Winters, held forth his hand in a gesture that meant one thing on any world.

"I thank you, man of Earth," he said gratefully. "I owe my life to you. And Thalakka, Captain of the Torthian Guard, will not forget."

"That's all right, chum," grinned Ramey. "A little swim goes good on a hot day like this. But I'd take a few lessons in the Australian crawl, if I were you."

He reached up to brush his dripping hair from his forehead. And as he did so, on his fingers he saw that which brought a sudden spasm of fear to his heart. For the fingers which had brushed his forehead were—yellow-brown! The dye! The dye with which he had been painted had streaked and run!

Even as the knowledge struck him, came corroboration in a cry from the overhanging balcony above his head. A call in tones that Ramey Winters recognized all too well, the vibrant, bell-like voice of the Lady Rakshasi.

"Warriors! Seize that man! Seize him and guard him well! He is a spy from the camp of our enemy, Sugriva!"

CHAPTER XIII

Vibhishana

AFTER that, the tide of events welled almost too fast for Ramey's comprehension, certainly too fast for his peace of mind. Again—as on the opposite shore, but this time grimly, tightly—he found himself emprisoned by the powerful arms of Videlian soldiers. He was aware of tossing a mute, apologetic glance in Sheng-ti's direction, and of seeing the old Buddhist bow his head, hearing the *bonze* mutter, "It is the Will of Him Who watches. You could not have done otherwise, my son."

Then the Lady Rakshasi herself, a great, golden panther with eyes glinting triumphantly, was before him.

"We meet again—so soon, my Lord Ramaíya?" she asked mockingly. Then to the soldiers, "Take him to my brother!"

Ravana sat in his council-hall, imperiously enthroned on a dais ornamented, Ramey could not help but think dazedly, with all the wealth of the Indies. The Gaanelian lord Sugriva held court in a chamber rich and luxurious, too, but never had its pomp and circumstance compared with such ostentation as this. The richness of Sugriva's throne-room was that of painstaking artistry, hand-wrought by craftsmen whose hearts w e r e in their work, whose hands loved the tools with which they labored. But Ravana's throne-room was one vast blaze of opulence! Rarest gems from the far-flung corners of the globe . . . tapestries that seem to flow with restless life . . . teakwood and burnished ebony . . . sandalwood, mother-of-pearl encrusted . . . ivory from tushes so huge one could scarcely conceive the size of the beast which had borne them.

No single man, Ramey Winters knew with swift positiveness, could have gathered together such a display save at the cost of other men's blood! Each gem that lent its hue to the array seemed to cry a horrid tale of death and sorrow; even the fragrance of rare scents wafting through the room seemed coarsened by an underlying

reek of blood and death. Thus the great hall in which the Lord Ravana held court.

The Videlian overlord was toying with an oddly shaped instrument as the captives were brought into his presence. A metal arch about three feet long, supported by a cross-brace upon which was mounted a sealed cylinder, also of metal. He laid this aside as Ramey and Sheng-ti were prodded before him, but not so swiftly that Ramey could not recognize it. It was the Bow—the Bow of Rudra! And—Ramey's spirits lifted—the very fact that Ravana toyed with it, studying it curiously, was evidence that so far it had not been charged.

For a fleeting instant the Videlian's eyes shadowed with fear as he identified the pair thrust before him. Then his eyes lighted with an expression of unpleasant amusement.

He said mockingly, "And what have we here? It is a swill-drenched alley-cat—No! By my faith, 'tis a man-god! The one who called himself the Lord Ramaiya!" He touched his forehead in a sign of taunting obeisance. "Welcome, my Lord! We had not expected to greet thee so soon in our humble palace."

Poker, thought Ramey suddenly. The good old Yankee game of bluff. There was a bare possibility—

HE took a step forward, his head proud, eyes coldly judicial.

"We have come, Lord Ravana," he declared boldly, "to reclaim our Bow. Now I offer you a last and fair opportunity. Return it and the goddess Sheilacita, and we will leave without exacting vengeance for your impiety."

It was a sandy . . . a four-flush sandy with the wrong colored card in the hole . . . but it *almost* worked. The overlord of Lanka stopped smiling; his eyes darted troubledly toward his sister. But the Lady Rakshasi merely laughed, her voice a golden throbbing in the golden room.

"If my Lord Ramaiya be indeed a god," she challenged, "let him prove his omnipotence! Let the Bow return itself to his hand of its accord. Nay, brother. Methinks there be little godlike in this paint-smeared, skulking spy, nor even in his cringing goddess love."

She almost spat the last words. Hearing the spiteful note in her voice, Ramey realized that hell, indeed, has no fury like a woman scorned. The Lady Rakshasi was exacting her vengeance, now, for the moment of ignominy she had experienced when Ramey had rejected her caresses for the gentler love of Sheila Aiken. But he said nothing. There was nothing to say. Ravana, his confidence restored, leaned forward arrogantly.

"And how came these would-be gods hither?"

It was Captain Thalakka who answered. Plainly he did not understand a tithe of what was going on. He said, "They approached our ferry-port on the mainland shore, my Lord, and said they were wayfarers from distant Penang, come to seek employment in thy service. The—" He nodded toward Ramey uncertainly—"the white-skinned one saved thy servant's life."

"So?" Ravana chuckled. It was not a pleasant sound to hear. "We wonder if he can so easily save his own? Well, Earthman—have you anything to say?"

"One thing," said Ramey. "Have a care, Lord Ravana, lest your lust for power destroy you. The Lord Sugriva knows your plans, and he will not stand idly by to watch their accomplishment."

"Thinks he not? And how, pray, does he plan to stay them? You forget, Lord Ramaiya, that I have now the Weapon. The Bow of Rudra, which burns and destroys."

"You hold its empty shell," stated Ramey assuredly. "The gods alone can waken it to power."

"Then," chuckled Ravana, "must I be one of the gods. For already my captains are gathering the ammunition to feed its chamber. Within the space of days, the Bow will carry a full belly. And when that moment comes—then let the Gaanelian weakling, Surgriva, approach Lanka—if he dares!" Ravana nodded to Captain Thalakka. "Very well, Captain. Take these swine away —"

"A MOMENT!" cried Ramey. "Ravana — the Lady Sheilacita! Where is she?"

Again the Videlian laughed. This time there was a note of pleased anticipation in his voice. "Concern yourself not about the woman, my Lord Ramaiya," he gibed. "She awaits my pleasure. Nor shall I keep her waiting long. As soon as these slight matters of state have been cleared up, the Lady Sheilacita will receive the great honor of becoming one of my mates. It is only right and proper, is it not, that the Videlian colony on your earth should some day be peopled with a race born half of earthling blood? You see —" he chuckled coarsely— "I have higher aspirations for the future of your world than has the Lord Sugriva, who would raise to mock manhood the hairy apes of the jungle. Careful, earthman! Dare not my wrath!" His warning halted Ramey's impulsive forward movement. Ravana motioned again to the waiting captain. "I weary of my guests, Captain Thalakka. Take them away. Place them in the dungeons to await my later decision."

He lolled back in his throne, signifying the audience at an end. Captain Thalakka gestured his captives toward the door. As they left the room, there floated high and clear above the nervous hubbub of palace movement, the mocking, bell-like laughter of the Lady Rakshasi . . .

RAMEY had guessed, from its exterior, that the citadel on Lanka was a tremendous place. He had not been able to appraise its full enormity from the outside, though. That he realized as Captain Thalakka led him and the silent Sheng-ti through corridor after lofting corridor, past mighty chambers and halls; down, down and ever down into the entrails of the citadel, into the dungeons festering below.

Ever, as they pressed onward and downward, Ramey had an eye peeled for the likely spot, the strategic moment, that might offer escape. But he found none. Lanka was more than a palace, more than mere bulwarked ramparts of stone. It was an armed camp, seething with a seemingly endless host of Videlian giants, its population swelled to thousands by slaves impressed from the children of earth.

So he resigned himself, as he had once before, to a principle of "watchful waiting." Incarceration was not to be his ultimate fate. The Lord Ravana had made that point clear and emphatic. So however deep he might burrow beneath Lanka *now*, there would come a time when he would again see day. If he waited, laid his plans for that time . . .

Curiously enough, it was Captain Thalakka who waxed gloomiest as the trio descended interminable stairs into the black depths of Lanka. The tall, golden-skinned warrior fumed with brooding restlessness, a torment that finally would not be restrained. He turned to Ramey, his eyes haggard.

"Now, Lord Ramaiya," he cried angrily, "am I, Thalakka, Captain of the Torthian Guard, a shamed and sor-

rowed man! It is iron to my soul that I, who owe you my life, should be the one to lead you to a foul and certain doom!"

Ramey said quietly, "You're just doing your duty, my captain. I don't hold this against you. But—thanks. It's nice to know that all Videlians are not brutes."

"Then I hold it against myself!" groaned the Martian soldier. "As for we of Videlia—" There was a note of bitter savagery in his voice— "Do not judge us all by him who has seized the throne of Lanka. Many of us there are who rue the day he usurped the rulership of this colony, hurling into the dungeons his own brother. Aye, many there are who would gladly live in peace with you earthmen. Had we but the courage and strength to do so—"

RAMEY glanced at him swiftly, appraisingly. "Go on, Thalakka!" he encouraged. "What do you mean?"

But the Videlian's jaw had set, as if he feared that already he had said too much. His eyes darted about the gray corridors anxiously, and he whispered, "Speak softly, man of earth. These very walls have wagging tongues. But, hark ye! In the foul pits we now approach you will find another. One named Vibhishana, blood-brother of the Lord Ravana. Gain him to your cause and—who knows what may transpire?

"For *you*, even though you are my friend and the one to whom I owe my life, I can do little. But were Lord Vibhishana your pledged ally, much might be done on your behalf."

"You mean—?"

"I mean," continued the Videlian hurriedly, "that at the middle watch this night I will come to the dungeon gates. If that third one whose name I have already told is with you, I can pledge that there will be guards in the corridors who will turn a blind eye to your passage. And now—" His tone changed abruptly, became harsh, commanding— "Cease thy noisy bleating, serfs! Thank your stupid earth gods thy lives have been spared— Ah! warder, open your doors and rid me of these earthling scum!"

They had stopped, at last, before a huge bronze door at what must be, thought Ramey, judging from the clammy dampness moisturing the walls, the stale and foetid air, the very bottom of the fortress. And at Captain Thalakka's call, came shuffling to them a gnarled, coarse figure bearing on a great ring the key to the donjon-keep. He squinted at the captives suspiciously.

"Scum indeed, Captain Thalakka! Why sent our leader these earth dogs hither?"

"For safekeeping," answered Thalakka, "until he finds time to decide their fate."

The warder grinned evilly. "Then I shall not have to bother with them long," he hazarded. "Our Lord Ravana is not one to delay his decisions. Well, filth—in with you!" His key grated in the lock; with a scraggly hand he thrust Sheng-ti and Ramey through the portal. "And mind you disturb me not, or I'll come a-visiting with the lash!"

Again he turned the clef, securing the doorway after them. Then, still chuckling, he shuffled away. But Thalakka pressed his lips once to the grill before he, too, disappeared. And the words he whispered were, "Courage! Tonight!"

BEING thrust into these dungeons, Ramey discovered, was unlike being imprisoned in the cell-block of a modern—a 20th Century—jail. Here

were no neat, ordered individual cells, no runways with pacing guards, no blazing lights, no clean, steel avenues astringent with the odor of disinfectant. When the gate clanged shut behind him, darkness surged in to engulf him in a maw of ebon velvet; his feet slipped on damp masonry, and for a moment a sense of panic fear, instinctive, unreasoning, gripped him.

In that moment he was glad of the presence of Sheng-ti. For nothing could disturb the smooth complaisance of the aged *bonze*. His hand, upholding Ramey, was warm and serene, his voice reassuring.

"Peace, my son! We are at least alone, and in solitude is strength."

Ramey grinned at him, an ivisible g r i n to an invisible companion. "Thanks, old man," he said. "I guess it's the dark. I went into a tail-spin for a second."

"It is written," said Sheng-ti, "that darkness is naught but the shadow of the gods. Yet, behold! Even now it is not dark. See—in the distance?"

Now that his eyes had accustomed themselves to gloom Ramey saw that, indeed, there was a faint smudge of light before him. By it he recognized that they stood at the threshold of but one of a numberless series of connected chambers; h i g h, vaulted caverns, sturdywalled and windowless, supported by massive columns which might have been hewn from solid rock. Now, completely in possession of himself again, it was Ramey who took the initiative. He gripped his friend's arm, propelling him forward.

"Where there is light," he said, "there must be men. These dungeons are not tenantless. Come on!"

And together they picked their way, on feet rapidly growing more sure, toward the faraway smudge.

As they drew nearer its source, they discovered that the illumination came from guttering candles, and from small bonfires over which, like so many wraiths huddling from the frightful chill of Limbo, hunkered the figures of other prisoners. Many were these, and of all races. Earthmen and Videlians alike were the exiles of this abandoned gaol. They did not mingle together, but in little clans: groups similar in color or in creed, in physiognomy or faith. Although they shared an identical fate, it was evident by the angry glances which passed between one group and another, by the bickering of individual leaders, that there was strife and distrust between these companies.

An example of this smouldering hatred showed itself as Ramey and Sheng-ti considered which of the groups it were best they should approach.

THE apparent leader of one tiny clan, a tall, strong-thewed earthman whose race Ramey would have identified tentatively as Coptic, had been muttering to himself audibly. Now he rose to his full height, swift decision seeming to fan to a blaze the long-contained flame within him.

"Like dogs! Like mangy dogs filthy with vermin they cage us in this stinking hole! And do we rebel? Nay! Like whipped curs we bow before the cursed Videlians—when even our food and drink must be shared with the castoffs of their race!"

He glowered across the room to another fire, gathered about which was a tiny knot of Videlians. An elderly man looked to be leader of these, for as the Coptic chieftain let loose his blast, one of the Martian prisoners stirred, would have risen to reply had not the older man stayed him.

Fellow of the Copt's clan muttered hoarse approval of his words; from other groups came rumblings of en-

couragement. But one prisoner—an Erse, Ramey guessed, or perhaps a Cym —laughed sardonically.

"And what would you do about it, Tauthus of Cush?"

The mighty one's eyes glinted in the firelight like shards of flint. "I would talk less," he bellowed in reply, "and act more! I would regain a vestige of my lost manhood, beginning by wreaking vengeance on those who are of the race of our oppressors. Like *this!*"

And like a cat leaping, so swiftly that none could move to deter him, he rushed from his own fire to that where gathered the Videlians. With one blow he felled a startled Martian youth jumping up to meet him. Then, gripping the old man in strong hands, he yanked him to his feet. Light shone on a scrap of metal in his hands, a rude knife painstakingly wrought from a forgotten file.

"Thus," he roared, "to all Videlians!" The raw blade descended . . .

BUT if all others stood too stunned to move, not so Ramey Winters. A fighting-man himself, he had recognized instantly that there was no-acting in the defi of Tauthus of Cush. The Copt was in deadly earnest. And even as his arm upraised, Ramey thrust forward boldly into the chamber. His voice ringing unexpectedly loud in the echoing vaults, had the explosive vigor of lightning.

"Hold!" he cried. "Strike not, son of Earth!"

As a moment frozen in imperishable pigments, everything stopped! The cry of blood-lusting voices dwindled into shocked silence . . . the upraised arm fell not . . . the straining figures locked in fantastic poses as if carven so. Then with infinite slowness the head of Tauthus turned. His eyes sought and found his accoster, narrowed menacingly.

"And who are you," he rumbled, "to give commands?"

There was still an automatic beneath Ramey's girdle, a weapon which the Videlians, unsuspecting of its nature, had not taken from him. But he made no move to use it. Instead, he stepped forward still farther that the light might shine upon his features. His face was grave and anxious, his tone beseeching.

"An earthman like yourself, Tauthus of Cush. And a prisoner. But one who realizes that in wanton destruction of each other does not lie the way of our salvation."

"The Videlians," said Tauthus grimly, "are our captors and our foes. This aged stick is a Videlian—"

"—and a prisoner," argued Ramey desperately, "like ourselves. Is that not proof enough he is no ally of the Lord Ravana? Evidence that his foe is our foe? If you kill this man, you do a service to the lord we hate. Can you not hear the laughter of Ravana at learning his prisoners fight amongst themselves, destroy each other?"

AND—the battle of words was won! Tauthus of Cush dropped his blade into his belt, released his captive sheepishly and moved away. A man of spirit he was, but he was a man of logic, too. He said thoughtfully, "There is wisdom in what you say, stranger. But, mind you—" And he glared at those who were now circling about them curiously —"let none think cowardice stayed the wrath of Tauthus, or that fellow's guts shall feed the rats!"

"None shall think that, Tauthus," Ramey assured him. "If I read not the future wrongly, the time comes, and it not far removed, when each and every man in this dungeon shall be given the chance to prove his valor."

An eager light flashed in the other man's eyes. He said hoarsely, "What

mean you, newcomer?"

"I shall tell you. But first—how many prisoners dwell in these caverns?"

Tauthus shrugged.

"Who knows? Three score, perhaps? Maybe more?"

"Can you gather their group leaders, their captains, for a council?"

The Coptic chieftain nodded. "That I can, and will." To decide, with Tauthus of Cush, was to act. He wheeled away abruptly, began shouting orders. "You . . . and you . . . and you! Haste into the farthest reaches of the dungeon. Gather here all who dare die that they might live again. Hurry—"

Now the white-haired Videlian, who had stood quietly at Ramey's side throughout this interlude, turned to his protector.

"Man of Earth," he said gravely, "I thank you. Not for myself, because my life is of little importance. But for having quelled an act which might have destroyed us all. Can I repay you in any way? What can I do to help this plan you have?"

"Nothing just now, thanks," said Ramey. "Later, perhaps— Wait a minute! You *can* help me. Point out which of the Videlians is known as Vibhishana."

The old man smiled sadly.

"That will not be hard, my friend," he said. "For *I* am—or once was—the Lord Vibhishana."

CHAPTER XIV

Escape

RAMEY stared at the claimant incredulously. Surely this man could not be the brother of Lord Ravana! Father or uncle, perhaps. But—

Then, peering more closely at the older man he realized it was not so much age that had whitened Vibhishana's hair, bowed his shoulders, creased and lined his cheeks, as it was privation. Privation, worry and sorrow. And studying the Martian he now could trace a family resemblance. Vibhishana had a nose as aquiline and proud as that of the arrogant Ravana, lips full and delicately-turned as those tempting ones of the Lady Ravana. He differed from his younger brother and sister in that his eyes were warm and friendly, where theirs were intense as a wind-swept flame, his manner was gentle and self-effacing, where theirs was haughty. Said Ramey:

"It is so! Yes, I see it now. You *are* Vibhishana."

"Once Regent," said the older man sorrowfully, "of Videlia's colony on Earth. Now a prisoner in the citadel I once dreamed would be a refuge and gathering-place for every race that treads this planet. Aye, it is a sad end to which my dreams have come, stranger. But who are you? Whence came you here, and why?"

Ramey told him then, briefly, that which had gone before. Vibhishana listened eagerly and—what was more surprising — comprehendingly. Not even was he amazed when Ramey told of the time machine. He but nodded.

"Ah, yes! That would be the invention of the Gaanelian lord, Rudra. He was a brilliant one. He invented also a Bow. A frightful weapon. Had it been mine, never would Ravana have dared rise against me. Where is the Bow now? Does not Sugriva have it?"

"It is here," Ramey told him grimly, "at Lanka. So far it has done Ravana no good, because it isn't charged for operation. But he has sent his men out to find the precious element which operates it. If he gets the ammunition before we can invade Lanka, I'm afraid the fight will be over. What *is* this ammunition, anyway?" It was a question

that had long puzzled Ramey. "Some rare type of explosive?"

"A metal," explained Vibhishana. "What your tongue would call it, I do not know. We know it as the element *banaratha.* A metal more rare than perfect gold; yea, even rarer than the dull platinum of Earth's frigid poles. You are indeed undone, Ramey Winters, if my brother has located enough of it to fuel the Bow of Rudra." He shook his head sadly. "It is a shame he brings down upon the fair name of Videlia, my power-greedy brother. Whether he win or lose, for ages to come shall the name of my home planet be associated with the thoughts of war, death and conquest."

HE spoke, thought Ramey with a strange tingling in his spine, more truly than he knew. And a dim wonderment grew in Ramey that he, a Twentieth Century man, should listen to a prediction made centuries before his birth, and recognize that prophecy to have been fulfilled. For in the world from which Ramey had come, the name of Vibhishana's homeland, Mars, was invariably, inevitably, associated with thoughts of war, death and conquest. And this for no reason known to the memory of living man . . .

But he said, "Then you shared not Ravana's desire?"

"Shared it!" Vibhishana's voice deepened angrily. "You dare accuse me—I am sorry, Ramey Winters. You did not mean to offend, I know. But believe me, never for an instant did I, when I ruled Lanka, harbor any lust for dominion over your people. With the Gaanelian lord I cherished the dream that we of the more advanced cultures might help improve your planet, make it a finer world for your people. All I asked of earthmen was their allegiance, small territorial rights on which to base a sound commerce and a solid economy between our two homelands.

"Perhaps—" he continued almost wistfully— "even more than Sugriva I cherished this hope. For his race, the blue ones of Gaanel, are after all of a different stock. We of Videlia, and you of Earth, are of the same seed. Behold your compaion, Ramey Winters. Can you deny that from the same source sprang the root which was to nourish us both?"

There was, indeed, a great similarity between Sheng-ti and Vibhishana. Both were tall, both almost beardless by nature, both ochre-skinned. And the "Mongolian fold," that small, peculiarly creased fold of flesh which lends obliquity to the typical Oriental eye, was common to both men.

Ramey said, perplexed, "But—but that would indicate that ages before *this* your world must have had intercourse with ours. Yet Sugriva said his planet was the first to develop space-travel—"

"Even the Lord Sugriva can err, Ramey Winters. The dead past buries many secrets. We of Videlia have a legend that our civilization sprang from a planet now vanished from the heavens, a mighty race whose home-world was destroyed in a frightful cataclysm. Who knows but that refugees from this earlier world might have emigrated to each of our two younger ones?*

"But enough of this now. I see the companions of Tauthus are back, bringing with them the captains. For what reason summoned you them?"

Ramey turned to where Tauthus stood chafing impatiently for this palaver to end. As Vibhishana had said, the

* Many astronomers believe the planetoids (or asteroids) which girdle space between Mars and Jupiter are the fragments of a true planet formerly located in that orbit. In his book *Ragnarok,* Ignatius Donnelly suggests that this planet may have been destroyed by a comet.—Ed.

captains had gathered. And a rougher, tougher, meaner-looking crew, Ramey had never set eyes on in his life. But they were a sight calculated to warm the heart of a fighting man. Ramey stepped into their midst.

"Now, this—" he began— "this is my plan . . ."

WITHOUT artificial means, it would have been impossible to tell, in the dungeons beneath Lanka, what hour of day or night it was. No feeblest ray of sun light ever penetrated this dank depths; skins were colorless, gums sloughing-sore, and hair without lustre amongst those who had lain long in the prison.

But the candles spluttering fitfully upon the walls, and the periodic visits of the gaolers with food and drink, by these had the prisoners managed to maintain some cognizance of what hour it was outside their walls.

Thus, at the middle watch of the night, his campaign mapped out and approved by hastily-selected lieutenants, Ramey Winters waited feverishly by the outer door of the dungeon.

So long he had crouched at this post, so long counted the beat of his pulse in eager expectation, that it seemed to him the hour of appointment must have long since passed. But at last his vigil was rewarded. There came the clanking of harness, the rasp of sandaled feet on harsh stone, and the voice of Captain Thalakka.

"Warder!"

"Aye? What is it? Who calls?" The shuffling footsteps of the gaoler. "Ah, you again, Captain? What is it?" "A meeting of all prison guards," said the Videlian, "on the fourth level. I have come to relieve you so you may attend. You may hand over the keys."

A long silence. Then: "Mighty unusual!" declared the warder. "Nothing like this ever happened before!"

"These are unusual times. Nothing like an invasion of Lanka was ever attempted before. But the monkey-warriors of Sugriva are even now assembled on the mainland shore, and our defense measures must be studied."

"Say you so!" There came the jangle of metal passing from one hand to another. "Invasion, eh? Well, I'll be running along, then. I'll have more prisoners to take care of when this is over, eh, captain?"

And giggling evilly, the warder shuffled away.

Another slow century dripped by before his footsteps disappeared in the distance. Then came the swift whisper of Captain Thalakka:

"My Lord? My Lord Ramaiya?"

"We are here," Ramey whispered back. "All three of us. Open swiftly!"

THE key grated in the lock, the door swung open, and momentarily blinded by the lights of the corridor, Ramey elbowed forward to freedom. Behind him came Sheng-ti, then Vibhishana, then—

Captain Thalakka so far forgot himself as to loose a little cry. "But—but what is this, Lord Ramaiya! Behind you! The prisoners! This I cannot allow! No! For you, to whom I owe my life, I have risked much that you might escape. But not even for you can I betray the fortress, my Lord Ravana and my comrades-in-arms—"

But a taller, slimmer figure brushed past Ramey Winters to confront the protesting soldier. And:

"Nor even for *me,* Captain?" asked Vibhishana gently.

The warrior stared. Just for a moment. Then a look of humility, in which was strangely mingled joy, flooded into his eyes. He went to one knee. "My Lord!" he breathed. "My Lord Vibhis-

hana! Is it thy will this should be permitted?"

"Not only my will," said Vibhishana firmly, "but my determination. The hour for vengeance has struck. Tell me, my captain—how many of the old guard stand ready to strike a blow for honor and the elder suzerainty?"

"Many, my Lord," replied Thalakka humbly. "And many more when the news of thy release bruits about. The corridors leading to the lakeside port are even now lined with those of my men who love thee above the cruel Ravana. Thus prepared I for thy escape—"

"And thus," nodded Vibhishana, "shall our earthborn allies return to rally their forces. But meanwhile I remain to gather about me those who would fight my cause. Vanguard of my new army shall be those with whom I languished in these dungeons. Can you arm them?"

Thalakka glanced dubiously at the ragtag aggregation of human flotsam seeping through the bronze gate. He nodded.

"Aye. Even so, my Lord."

"Then do so. And now, Ramey Winters—" Vibhishana pressed the young American's shoulder warmly—"for a time we must part. But all of us know the Plan. We shall create a diversion for your escape. Haste to the mainland and bring to Lanka as speedily as possible all the fighting-men Sugriva has gathered. If fortune favor us, we shall have won a foothold on some niche of Lanka. That spot will be your landing-place. Now go—and may the gods go with you!"

Ramey said nothing. But his jaw was set in a line that boded no good for any man who tried to restrain him from his part of the Plan. He glanced at Thalakka. The captain gestured.

"This way, Lord Ramaiya—"

And stealthily the trio moved upward from the bowels of Lanka, while behind them a fledgling army surged from pits of darkness and despair into a world of new hope . . .

THRICE the adventurers passed posts whereat Videlian guards stood watch; thrice a hasty sign, a word from the Captain Thalakka, caused these sentries to glance the other way. Only once had they to pass a warrior whose allegiance was not pledged to Vibhishana, but his brother. And Thalakka brazened his way past this station with a word of explanation.

"Prisoners from the camp of Sugriva. Being taken to the Lord Ravana for questioning."

And at last, having ascended countless stages, they were in a small chamber through the windows of which blew the sweet, clean night air of lake waters. Here Thalakka halted.

"This room fronts on the waterside. Beyond that door lies a small, private wharf, beside which waits a skiff. It is watched now, but you hide here and wait. I shall return to arm the friends of my Lord Vibhishana. When this is done, these men and those of my soldiers whom I can trust will attack the third level garrison of the citadel. An alarm will draw the guard from the wharf. When he leaves, you must get to the boat swiftly and flee to the mainland."

Ramey said simply, "We understand, Thalakka. Thank you."

The Videlian captain smiled. "I accept your thanks, Lord Ramaiya, but I need them not. My heart tells me I have done well. Godspeed to you!"

And he was gone. Sheng-ti and Ramey took concealment in convenient shadows, and again embarked on the nerve-wracking experience of waiting . . . waiting . . . waiting . . . until an

alarm should sound the moment for their next move.

It came at last, after so long a time that Ramey's muscles were stiff with crouching, his palms damply cold with apprehension, his nerves atingle with flame It came with a crashing *croo-oo-onge!* of sound that smashed through the corridors of Lanka, rolling and echoing, re-echoing. The beat of a mighty hammer on a monstrous gong.

Then voices shattered the silence of the sleeping citadel, the vaulted avenues rang shrill with the clatter of armed men racing to their appointed posts, and—it may have been pure imagination—from far below Ramey thought his ear detected the harsher cries of battling men, the faint echoes of weapons clashing in combat.

His every instinct yearned to be part of that combat, but such was not his rôle in the campaign. Lightly he rose from his hiding place, raced across to the windows. As Thalakka had predicted, the curious guard had been drawn from his post by the clamor. By the filtering gleam of a newborn moon Ramey saw the dock and the tiny, bobbing object at its side.

"All right!" he breathed to Sheng-ti. "Come on!"

AND the hopes of his well-wishers were realized. No eye spied them as they clambered through the portal, over a tiny balcony, and down to the lakeside. No voice lifted to question them as they unleashed the rocking craft beside the pier. Elsewhere on Lanka new lights flashed from a score of windows, the cries of captains rallying their men split the quiet night. But as far removed from all this hubbub as two gray ghost were Ramey Winters and his companion. Silently they slipped boat from wharf, silently dipped blades into the water. And in the space of a dozen breaths, they were off to the distant shore on which dimly gleamed the campfires of the army of Sugriva.

It was a tedious trip for two oarsmen, one of whom had not touched an oar for twenty years, the other of whose hands was more accustomed to the slim control stick of an airplane. But dimmer and more shadowy in the distance grew the isle of slaves, ever nearer and more cheerful loomed before them the camp toward which they strained. Until at last they could distinguish figures about the campfires, could almost hear the voices of their friends. And then—

"Ramey! Ramey Winters!" Sheng-ti stopped pulling at his oars, craned back toward his friend. "Hark! I heard the crack of oarlocks—"

Ramey stiffened, his feathering oars shipped swiftly. Over the steady *lap-lap* of lake water he too now heard that which had alarmed the *bonze*. He whispered, "Over that way!"

"Ravana's men. The rebellion has been subdued, and they've come after us!"

Ramey laughed; a short, hard, mirthless husk it was.

"Well, they'll never take us—now! Not while we're alive!" He tugged from his waistband that which until now he had avoided using; his automatic. Leveled it uncertainly toward the fear-inspiring sound. Waited . . .

And a cold voice gritted on his eardrums.

"You there in the other boat! Who are you, and what are you doing?"

CHAPTER XV

Land-bridge to Lanka

IT IS in moments of great stress that man's emotions play the strangest pranks.

When he heard that voice, Ramey Winters had been on the verge of firing into the pale heart of mist that engulfed him. Now suddenly his fingers were nerveless, the automatic tumbled unheeded from his hand, and his voice cracked with a cry of almost hysterical laughter.

"Red! Red, it's me—Ramey! And Sheng-ti."

Now wood scraped wood, another boat loomed dark beside them, and Red Barrett's hard, familiar features stared across at Ramey. The redhead's eyes were wide with gladness; with joyous abandon he brandished his own pistol in delighted circles.

"Ramey, you old son-of-a-gun! Am I ever glad to see you! We'd just about given you up for—"

He stopped, hesitant, apologetic. Ramey grinned.

"Dead? Nothing like it, guy. I take a lot of killing. But I wouldn't like to check out on the friendly accident list. You'd better put that peashooter away before you hurt somebody."

Barrett said, "Hold the boat, chum, I'm coming over." To a dim figure in his own craft, "Take this crate home again, James. I won't be needing it no more tonight."

"Who was that with you?" asked Ramey curiously when his friend had safely trans-shipped. "One of the O'Briens?"

"Syd and Lake? No, they're in a huddle with Sugriva and Doc Aiken and Kohrisan. My chauffeur was one of them ape-soldiers. You know what, Ramey? We had them all wrong. You get to know those hairy little guys and they're okay."

"I've been meeting some people like that," Ramey nodded, "myself. How strong a force have you gathered?"

Red said, "Gimme them oars, Sheng-ti. You look like you're pooped. Me and Ramey can take her in from here. You said "force', keed? Well, now, that all depends. If we was back in the good old Twentieth A. D. I'd say it wasn't worth a hoot in hell. Hitler's blitzers would make hash out of it in something like ten seconds of the first round. But for this day and age, it ain't bad. About six divisions of talking apes, and maybe twice that many natives. But the hell with that. How about you? What have you been doing? And did you get the Bow? And where's Sheila?"

"I'll explain everything," said Ramey, "when we meet the others. Let's dock this jaloppy first."

AND that," concluded Ramey some time later, "is how things stood when he fled Lanka. Ravana still has the Bow, but it has not yet been charged. Sheila is under lock and key in the innermost chambers of the palace. Vibhishana is fighting to maintain a foothold within the citadel itself. How his fight is coming along we have no way of knowing, but it's a damned sure thing he can't hold out forever. We must come to his assistance, and do it before either his force is wiped out or Ravana fuels the Bow. Or—"

He shrugged expressively. Sugriva finished for him.

"Or Earth," he said soberly, "will be a vassal state to the Videlian overlord for the gods only know how many centuries. Yes, Ramey Winters, we must move—and move fast."

"You have mapped out a campaign?"

"Tentatively. Our native friends are throwing boats together for us . . . boats, rafts, skiffs, anything navigable. Under cover of tomorrow's midnight we had hoped to have enough of these to land a small scouting force. A suicide squadron whose sole purpose would

be to effect a landing, open a land salient. If they can hold their ground for twenty-four hours, we should be able to reinforce with another three or four divisions."

Barrett glanced at his friend anxiously.

"Well, Ramey? What do you think of it?"

Ramey shook his head slowly.

"It won't do. It's the old story of Britain in *our* time: 'Too little and too late.' Shen-ti and I have viewed Lanka and its defenses. Ravana has been preparing for this, Lord Sugriva, ever since he usurped the throne from his blood-brother. Lanka is a gigantic fortress, protected by a horde of armed and ready warriors. They would wipe out our 'token army' before it ever set foot within the castle walls."

The blue lord of Chitrakuta bowed his head sorrowfully. "You are right, my friend. And the fault is mine because I tried ever to espouse the dream of friendship amongst men, art, beauty. I have failed in my duty as a ruler and a protector of earth. I should have anticipated this eventuality and prepared for it."

Dr. Aiken said gently, "It is not your fault, Lord Sugriva, that the hearts of some are good and the hearts of others evil. But—what *can* we do, Ramey?"

"I'M trying to think," fumed Ramey desperately. "I know we must do something—and swiftly!—but the fact remains that we stand here boatless, powerless to move against Ravana's Gibraltar—*Gibraltar!*" He laughed ruefully. "The Isle of Lanka is more secure from invasion than even *that* bit of rock, because it's farther from the mainland."

Syd O'Brien said gloomily, "Yes, but don't forget, Winters, there's an Achilles' heel to any place if you can only find it. Armies have been trying unsuccessfully to take Gibraltar for centuries. But it's invaded every night by those who know how to do it."

Red Barrett stared at the pessimistic twin, puzzled.

"Invaded? Old Gib invaded? What are you trying to hand us, chum? You mean from the air? But we ain't got no airplanes—"

Dr. Aiken said, "No, Barrett, that's not what Sydney means. He is referring to a well-known fact which has baffled engineers, soldiers and scientists alike for many years: the fact that the Rock of Gibraltar, though a rock-bound island, is 'invaded' and deserted at will by the Barbary Apes."

The who-berry which?"

"Barbary Apes. The monkeys whose natural habitat is the African coast, some twelve miles distant. How these Apes enter and leave the Rock is, and has been, and probably always will be a mystery."*

Ramey said impatiently, "Very interesting. But we've no time for legends now, Doctor. Suppose we—"

He was interrupted by the single member of that assemblage least prone to voicing opinions. That one was the monkey captain, Kohrisan. It was hard to read emotion on his curiously wizened face, but his eyes had widened as Dr. Ian Aiken spoke. Now he leaped from his seat excitedly, pushed forward.

"Excuse me, my Lord Janakan," he chattered in that voice which, though it spoke human words, would always carry a flavor of the jungles whence he had sprung. "Excuse me—but—these invaders you called 'apes.' Were they

* This is not mere imaginative fiction. The mystery of the Barbary Apes continues to baffle the military men and cartographers of Gibraltar to this day. These African visitors seem to invade and desert the Rock at will, despite the fact there is no visible connection between the two places.—Ed.

'new men' like myself?"

"Yes, Captain Kohrisan. Quite like yourself. Save that they do not speak the tongue of men—"

"The Burrowers!" cried Kohrisan. "I have heard of them not only at this 'Jibra altar' you speak of but *here*—here at the Lake of Lanka! It may be true, the tales I have heard!" The little warrior was wildly excited now, beside himself with thoughts incomprehensible to the less impetuous humans. "Excuse me, my Lords! Your permission to withdraw, my Lord Sugriva? Thank you!" And without even waiting for the Gaanelian's acquiescence, he scampered from the meeting.

RED BARRETT stared after him, amused.

"Nice little guy, just the same," he said. "Kind of whacky, maybe, but a lot of humans are that way, too. You were saying, Ramey—?"

"I was saying," continued Ramey, "that our best bet seems to be another attempt to get the Bow of Rudra. We must give up our dream of an invasion in force. Select a group of our sturdiest fighters, join Vibhishana and somehow gain our way to Ravena's chamber. Once we have the Bow—"

"We are still powerless," finished Sugriva. "Hate me, O my friends, for ever thus disrupting your dreams. But the fact remains that we, no more than Ravana, have the fuel with which to charge the precious weapon!"

Lake O'Brien, who had been strangely silent for one usually so volatile, glanced at Ramey quizzically now.

"*Touché,* Winters," he acknowledged. "The Bow is no earthly use to us if it isn't working. And we have even less likelihood of fueling it within the deadline than has Ravana. Damn his rotten hide," he concluded almost as an afterthought.

It was, thought Ramey Winters with a sickening sense of fate preordained, like standing up against a fighter who outweighed you by fifty pounds. Whose skill and reach and strength were all greater than yours. Every time a plan presented itself, logic came rushing in to overthrow it.

He said, shakenly, "And what is this fuel, Sugriva? Have you none whatsoever at Chitrakuta?"

The blue lord shook his head regretfully.

"Not an ounce, child of earth. It is too rare. My brother Rudra, with all his scientific wisdom, succeeded in deriving only a tiny amount for his purposes from the mines at our disposal. Now all that has been used up.

"It is a metal. A most precious metal, ash-silver in hue, light as the down of a swan's breast, smooth to the touch—"

Ramey surrendered. "Okay," he said haggardly. "I'm licked. That's what Vibhishana told me, too. So I guess my idea wasn't so good, either. We'll have to think of some—"

"Sugriva!" That was Dr. Aiken breaking into the conversation. "The rare and precious metal you spoke of —"

"Banaratha," supplied the blue lord. "That is its name."

"Banaratha," nodded the old archeologist. "Would it by any chance look like—*this?"*

AND he brought from his pocket an object, handed it to the Gaanelian. For the first time since they had met him, Sugriva's calm was shattered into a thousand bits. His mouth dropped agape, his eyes widened, he rose, hand half-atremble. "But this—" he cried —"this is *banaratha* itself! The pure metal, the rare and vital gem of metals!"

"Sweet potatoes!" howled Red Bar-

rett. "Now where'd Doc get a hunk of that boogie-woogie stuff? Give me a gander, Doc!" Then, as he craned at the object Sugriva so tremulously held in his palm, his tone changed to one of disappointment. "Why, what's all the shouting about? That stuff's nothing but plain, old everyday—"

"Aluminum!" cried Lake O'Brien. glimpsing it. "Now I understand, Doctor! Of course it was rare—in this day and age! Until 1886 aluminum was so rare and so expensive as to be a laboratory curiosity.* Then Charles Martin Hall discovered that an electrolysis of bauxite dissolved in cryolite did the trick! So that's the 'rare metal' which fuels the Bow? Then, boys, we're walking ore-mines! Turn out your pockets!"

Ramey Winters had no pockets to turn out. He still wore the garb in which he had first visited Lanka, not having found time yet to change back to more comfortable garments. But his contribution was not needed. Dr. Aiken, Syd and Lake O'Brien, Red Barrett, all wore Twentieth Century clothes. They went to work on themselves, "Like mongrels scratching for fleas!" as Lake O'Brien put it. And the result of their self-appraisal was, a few minutes later, a pile of miscellaneous objects on a table before them which Sugriva declared positively would not only charge, but re-charge and charge yet again the dreadful Bow of Rudra!

Tunic-buttons, "luck-pieces" Barrett had picked up in Shanghai, a belt-buckle, suspender-clips from Syd's gaudy braces . . . these were some of the aluminum items they found on them. The tiny reflector Dr. Aiken had first shown Sugriva, a waterproof match-box from Syd, a patent screw-top container of ephedrine-inhalant used by Lake in hay-fever season . . . these joined the growing pile. It was an amazing assortment of junk. But looking upon it, the time-farers felt new hope dawning within them for the first time since Ravana's flight from Chitrakuta. And Ramey cried exultantly:

"We'll go back to the plan I suggested! We'll take the Bow from Ravana if I have to kill him with my bare hands to do it! We'll reach Lanka if we have to swim there—"

"But—" chattered a shrill and jubilant voice from the doorway—"it will not be necessary to do that, my Lord Ramaiya!"

Ramey whirled to look into the grinning face of the ape-captain, Kohrisan.

"Eh? What's that, Captain? Why not?"

"Because," declared the furry warrior staunchly, "I have won us new allies and found a better way. We will *walk* to the Isle of Lanka!"

CHAPTER XVI

Invasion

"WALK there!" The blue lord of Chitrakuta stared at his small captain confusedly. "Kohrisan, what mean you?"

"What I say, my Lord," grinned the 'new man' exhuberantly. "When I left thee, I went out even into the jungles to call my less fortunate brothers. They answered my call . . . and here is one of those who will show us the way." He drew back a flap of the pavilion in

* Few modern laymen realize that aluminum, now so commonly used by every household, was, less than a hundred years ago a "precious metal" known only to royal coffers and experimental laboratories. When a method of obtaining it freely from its native ores was finally invented, so inexperienced was the general public in its uses that a company had to be formed to "educate" mankind to its employment. Even today the many uses of aluminum are not yet decided.—Ed.

Ramey drew back the Bow of Rudra and clutched the firing lever

which they were gathered. A small, hairy figure edged in cautiously, glanced at the assembled humans and scuttled to Kohrisan's side fearfully.

Kohrisan chattered to the ape in swift monosyllables which meant nothing to the others. The beast's tremors died. Kohrisan turned proudly.

"My brother is a member of that clan which we of the jungles call 'The Burrowers.' They are not dwellers-in-the-trees, like the forest banderlogs. They make their homes in caves and hollows. Aye, and such artificers are they in delving that their tunnels put to shame even the works of their human brothers. Is it not so, O kinsman?"

It was Sugriva, who had spent long years in striving to improve the lot of these lesser men, who understand Kohrisan's meaning first.

"You mean, Captain Kohrisan," he asked breathlessly, "the Burrowers know of such a tunnel—to Lanka?"

"Even so, my Lord. And our brother, here, will show us the entrance to the underground passage." The ape-human grinned, exposing gleaming fangs. "They are clever builders, my brethren. The eyes of man are not keen enough to find the spot whence their passage leaves the mainland; nay, nor even where it disgorges into Lanka's very citadel. But it exists, even as Burrowers elsewhere built the tunnel which leads from Afric to the Altar of Jibra."

Ramey Winters struck his hands together gleefully.

"Then this fight's not over yet! It's just started—and the odds have changed! Come on! Let's see what this tunnel looks like!"

THUS, it was that hours later, as the jet curtain of jungle night trembled insecurely at its horizon, threatening to rise at any moment in the pearly flame of tropical dawn, Ramey stood for the *second* time at the mouth of the cavernous tunnel whose other maw disgorged into the very heart of Ravana's island stronghold.

This time he was not accompanied by a mere handful of his friends, and by a single chattering Burrower whose explanations had to be translated by Captain Kohrisan. Behind him were arraigned six full divisions of the ape-warrior's troops. Hairy archers, bows gripped and ready for split-second use, quivers abristle with shafts of feathered death . . . ape-lancers, stalwartly clenching razor-edged spears . . . ape-swordsmen, fully aware of what this battle meant to them and their kind. A great future, new manhood if it succeeded; a return to jungle savagery for all their kind if it failed.

Heading these was their commander, Kohrisan. Only human companion of Ramey on this expedition was Lake O'Brien, who insisted on becoming a member of the party.

"I'm going with, Winters," he declared flatly. "So take it or leave it!"

Ramey said worriedly, "But it—it's dangerous. We may run plunk into a detachment of Ravana's soldiers, and be wiped out before we even effect an entrance—"

"Sure," assented Lake cheerfully. "And we may bump into trolls and gnomes in yonder tunnel. It looks sinister enough. Stop talking, Ramey. You're wasting time. If anything should happen to you, there ought to be another earthman at Kohrisan's side. Anyhow—" He grinned—"I'd rather walk to Lanka than ride one of those junky boats. I get seasick easy."

Ramey surrendered, not without a secret pleasure at the gay O'Brien twin's insistence. He turned for the last time to Red Barrett.

"Got everything straight, Redhead?"

Barrett nodded.

"Check, pal! We let you get a half hour's start. Then me and Syd pile the other divisions of native soldiers into the boats and row slowly toward Lanka, making as much of a fuss as we can. That'll attract their attention, make 'em split up their forces, and relieve some of the pressure on old Vibby-what's-his-name."

"Right! And don't attempt a landing. Stay out of bow-range until you get some sort of signal from us. We'll try to clear a landing-port for you. Well—" Ramey took a deep breath, glanced at Kohrisan—"I guess we're set. Give the command, Captain."

And with the voluble little jungle-creature beside them, chattering, guiding, he and the ape-captain led the way into the underground passage.

HAD Ramey Winters been in exploring, rather than expeditionary, mood he would have found much to marvel at during the ensuing march.

Kohrisan had not exaggerated when he had called his Burrower brethren magnificent artificers. This tunnel, Ramey Winters was forced to concede, was as great an accomplishment as any ever wrought by supposedly superior Man. For a short space it dipped downward into the earth, out under the lake-shallows, on a gentle cline. Then it straightened, became a passage smooth and straight and true as if bored by a gigantic drill.

It did not provide quite enough headroom for Ramey and Lake. Six-footers each, they soon found their shoulders aching under the strain of walking with heads lowered beneath an arched roofway built to accommodate dwarfish figures. But this was the only inadequacy of the tunnel. In every other respect it was perfect. Its floor was smooth and dry. Its walls were hewn to glassy perfection, and by the light of the torches the wayfarers bore shone with a strange, azure glow.

How this wonder had been wrought was a question that perplexed Ramey, but his one effort to learn met with scant success. Kohrisan could not tell him, and the Burrower would not. Incessant chatterer the ape was, but he refused to tell this secret of his clan. So Ramey shelved the problem for the time being, resolving that at some later date he would try again.*

Gate To Hell Puzzle Solved By Scientists

LUCERNE, Switzerland (AP.)—Five Lucerne mountaineers have cleared up the mystery of the "Hellenloch," or "Gate to Hell," a cavernous hole in the Niederbauenalp

The cavern—from which the road of subterranean cataracts emerged—was discovered years ago by a party of Alpine climbers, but only a few days ago did scientists venture to descend into it. Using a rope 850 feet long, a windlass and crane, three of the party of five were lowered into the stygian hole. At a depth of 300 feet they found themselves in a "glacier-mill," or "giants's cauldron," said to be the largest ever discovered. It was an immense hollow 36 feet long and 23 feet wide with azure-colored walls that *were smooth as glass and that shone weirdly in the glow of flashlights.*

Four miles lay the Isle of Lanka from the mainland. Approximately an hour's march. When his wristwatch told him his force had reached the halfway mark, Ramey envisioned the scene transpiring on the lake's surface, perhaps above their very heads. Now, from the numerous wharves and docks, would be putting out a host of tiny craft filled with soldiers. A cry would rise from the citadel as these invaders were seen. Ravana's guards would be calling the alarm . . . forces now besieging Vib-

* The accompanying news-clipping might have helped Ramey solve the mystery—or might have only furthered his confusion. One truth shines clearly through the webwork of half-knowledge to which man is heir: That there exist in this world many ancient secrets as yet unsolved.—Ed.

hishana's tiny garrison might be diverted . . . there might even put out from Lanka an opposing "navy" . . .

But he could not concern himself with these things. He and his followers had their own, allotted duty; upon their success or failure hung the whole campaign.

"On!" he said to Kohrisan. "Faster!"

And Lake O'Brien, irrepressible even under circumstances as vital as these, chuckled.

" 'Sail on!' " he quoted extravagantly, " 'and on! Sail on!'—Hey, Ramey, old Columbus must have been a bargain-hunter the way he kept yapping about a 'Sale on!' "

. .

STILL on they pressed, while moments winged by at a tempo set by the slur of marching feet. And finally came an interruption to their swift progress. The Burrower chattered something to Kohrisan, the ape-captain cried the command to halt. Ramey glanced at him curiously.

"What is it, Captain? Something wrong?"

"Nay, my Lord. But the moment for extra caution is come. Behold the torch in thy hand."

The torch, which had been spluttering illumination in smoky waves before them, was now flaring more brightly. Its resined wood was licked by hungry flames that seemed to leap *forward.*

"Fresh air!" said Ramey. "A draught. Are we nearly there, Kohrisan?"

"Very near, my Lord. It is time to extinguish the torches and move forward silently."

"But we can't see in this darkness," Lake demurred.

"There will be light enough. See?" Kohrisan smothered his own torch against a wall, passed word back that all other torch-bearers should do the same. Soon all the lights were crushed into ash—but still the passageway glowed with a dull, gray illumination emanating from a tiny circle dimly seen before them. "The end of the tunnel, my Lords," whispered Kohrisan. "The moment for attack is ripe."

"And where does the tunnel emerge?" asked Ramey.

But the Burrower's answer was unsatisfactory. "Inside the palace," was the only information Kohrisan got from him. Thus, unknowing whether the next few minutes would see them stepping forward to greet friends or foes—but with every likelihood pointing toward the latter—the tiny army of invasion again moved forward. This time lightless, voiceless, and on creeping feet.

BUT at least a portion of their caution was a waste of energies. They need not have spoken in whispers. For as they approached nearer and ever nearer the circle which was the tunnel's exit, there smote their ears in full, reverberant cry the clash and clamor of battle waging wildly! Shouts of men, alive and angry, wounded and in pain, dying and fearful . . . the strident clang of metal upon metal . . . the *whirr!* of arrows seeking fleshy targets . . . these were the sounds which greeted their arrival.

And as they gained the exit, Ramey saw whence originated this tumult. Also he saw, and with a sense of sick despair, why the Burrower ape had boasted his clan's tunnel was so well concealed from the search of men.

For it was bitter battle between troops of Vibhishana and Ravana's hordes upon which Ramey and his rescue squad *looked down!* Down—from a tiny, frieze-embellished exit-hole near the roof of one of Lanka's highest chambers!

Fully fifty feet *below* them waged the

conflict . . . a battle between forces hopelessly outmatched. At the front of the decimated rebel group Ramey recognized men he knew, men who had been his companions in the dungeon. His great bulk sturdier still in battle-mail, Tauthus of Cush headed a handful of men desperately striving to hold a narrow doorway. Left flank of this party was protected by soldiers in the livery of Videlia . . . loyalists rallied by Thalakka, whose sword was among their own. Even as Ramey watched, an arrow shattered on the breastplate of the faithful guardsman, and Thalakka tottered and fell, driven to his knees by the sheer driving impact of that shaft.

A glowering foe, seeing Thalakka's plight, leaped forward, stabbing viciously at the fallen man. But as his sword lifted for the destroying blow, the young Martian who had opposed Tauthus yesterday in the gaol sprang forward to parry it with a thrust of his own. Thalakka's attacker fell, blood gushing from a great wound in his breast, and even as he rolled lifeless to the floor, Thalakka was on his feet again.

All this fifty feet below! And they, six fighting divisions, helpless to aid their friends! Ramey whirled to Kohrisan frantically.

"But how do we get down from here?"

Kohrisan grinned. There was fire in the ape-man's eye now. Ramey thought that never had Captain Kohrisan seemed less the man, more the jungle beast, than now. Battlelust seemed to have thickened even his speech; it was with difficulty he made the human words intelligible.

BUT his words were not directed to Ramey. He spoke to the warriors behind him. And they, obediently, sprang to their task. One wrapped his arms round a pillar standing at the lip of the exit. A second gripped the first ape's legs, and himself slipped over the ledge to dangle by his companion's heels. A third clambered over the body of his comrade to dangle a few more feet down the wall. A fourth . . . a fifth . . .

Lake cried hoarsely, "A ladder! A ladder of flesh and blood, Ramey! Of course! It is part of their jungle heritage!"

"But —" said Ramey to Kohrisan— "if one of them be killed? Then the ladder is broken—"

"And it will be rebuilt, Lord Ramaíya!" retorted the captain. "There! Now it reaches the floor below. Forward!"

Ramey said no more. All warfare is a gamble. This was no more desperate a measure than that one nation should hurl the soft bodies of men against the adamant ramparts of machines. Eyes glinting, he let himself over the ledge and hand-over-hand down the living chain that dangled to the room below.

He was but one of many. For now there were other chains . . . swarms of comrades flinging themselves down over the bodies of their brothers. And before his feet had touched the floor, he was surrounded by a force of more agile ape-warriors, turning to him for command. His voice could not be heard in the melee, but a gesture was enough.

"Forward!"

And to the relief of the beleaguered loyalists, like a great brown flood of strength, surged the monkey-soldiers. From the rear they struck, and there were scores of Videlians who fell without ever knowing what hand had struck them down. When finally they whirled to see this new danger descending upon them, already they were outnumbered. It scarcely mattered that one courageous archer broke a chain by piercing

the key-man on the ledge. Though a dozen tumbled headlong to the granite floor, instantly a new chain was forged. And in a trice, the complexion of the battle had changed. Now it was Ravana's men, instead of the loyalists, who were on the defensive. Hard-pressed, they withdrew from the doorway they had been attacking. But the moment their pressure was withdrawn, Thalakka and Tauthus roared their followers forward.

Thus, trapped between two forces, attacked alike by fresh and weary troops, the Videlians fell. Though giants in stature, they were no match for the squat little 'new men' of Chitrakuta. And at length, when the floor of the huge hall ran slippery-red, when the bodies of dead and dying formed a dreadful tapestry on crimsoned stone, the remnants of the doomed battalion surrendered.

THEN it was that Ramey, his heart great with gladness, raced to seek those whom strife and a common cause had already bound him into a brotherhood as strong as that of birth.

To the grinning Copt he cried, "Well done, Tauthus of Cush! This is a mighty battle you have won this day!"

And the tall man chuckled in reply, "The credit is thine, Ramaíya. You spoke the truth. There is more joy in this than in squabbling with these few Videlians who are our friends."

Said Thalakka soberly, "You came in the nick of time, my friend. We were hard-pressed. Nor is the battle yet won. Only this small corner of Lanka is now ours to hold. Ravana has yet thousands at his command elsewhere in the citadel."

"And we have thousands more on the way," Ramey promised him. "Ah, my Lord Vibhishana! Have your guards watched the lakefront? Are our troops on the water?"

The elderly ex-ruler of Lanka nodded gravely.

"Their boats hover outside bowrange, Ramaíya. The fleet of Ravana dared not attack Sugriva's larger force, but they are held in deadlock unless we can win them a landing-place. Is that thy plan?"

"That is the plan. Thalakka . . . Tauthus . . . Kohrisan! I leave its accomplishment to you. Somehow you must succeed in winning some section of the beach where our reinforcements may land."

"And you, Lord Ramaíya?" asked Tauthus anxiously.

"Where I go," Ramey told him grimly, "one man must go alone. I am going after the Bow of Rudra, fuel for which I have found. And I have—another reason. Lord Vibhishana, point me the way to Ravana's private chambers."

"Us!" corrected a lone voice.

Ramey turned to find Lake O'Brien at his shoulder. There was determination in the twin's eyes.

"That's right," Lake repeated, "Us! I'm declaring myself in again, Ramey. And shut up! Damned if you're not the arguingest guy I ever met!"

Ramey said firmly, "No, Lake! I was glad you came along with us through the tunnel. But this is *my* job. Because not only is the Bow in Ravana's quarters but—Sheila is there, too. You won't understand, but—she means more than anything else to me."

Lake returned his gaze quietly. For once there was no smile on his lips. He said, "But I do understand, Ramey. Perfectly. Because, you see, *I* have known Sheila Aiken for a long time, too."

"But you don't feel—" began Ramey hotly. Then he stopped, comprehension finally drawing upon him, sym-

pathy and embarrassment suddenly warm upon his cheeks. "Oh! So it—it's that way? I'm sorry, Lake. I didn't realize—"

"Neither does she," said Lake O'Brien. "But that's the way it is, Ramey. And always has been."

Tauthus of Cush was staring at them curiously. Now he said, "I do not quite understand, Lord Ramaiya. What are you going to do?"

And Ramey Winters answered, "It is a two man job we face. Lake and I are both going . . ."

CHAPTERXVII

The Love of Lady Rakshasi

IN THE period that ensued, Ramey had reason to be glad that Lake O'Brien *had* insisted on accompanying him.

True, the Lord Vibhishana had given him instructions for finding Ravana's chambers. Had Lanka been other than in a state of seige, Ramey could have reached his objective in simple fashion. But it had been impossible to take into account the constant stream of Videlians racing hither and thither through the corridors of the citadel . . .the guards . . . the messengers . . . the armed companies marching to take their emergency battle-posts.

More than once, Ramey and Lake were forced to take refuge in whatever places of concealment offered. More than once they were forced to desert entirely the path they had been following, choose a new route altogether toward their objective. And with each devious turning, Vibhishana's directions became more obscure and confused, until Ramey, at last, knew neither were Ravana's chambers lay nor, indeed, where he himself was!

It was then that Lake O'Brien proved himself an indispensable ally. Educated in architecture, trained in the hard and practical school of active archeology, he displayed an almost psychic sense of location. With fine discernment he *reasoned* his way through the tumultuous labyrinth which was Lanka. Up two levels—*"The Regent's quarters are always in mid-palace, Ramey"*—to a series of marble halls, left to that side of the citadel facing the ferry-ports—*"stands to reason his apartment would face the docks, you know"*—and finally, justifying the precepts of pure logic, into chambers more sumptuous than any Ramey had laid eyes on since he confronted Ravana in the throne-room.

The passage was swift, but not entirely unimpeded. It was their good fortune, though, that such Videlians as they met along the way were either traveling in groups—in which case the clank of their accountrement served as noisy warning, sending the two to cover—or were single guards, set to watch over a strategic doorway. And as is ever the case where strong walls lend a sense of false security, the guards had grown careless. This was an error for which two who fought paid with their lives. Three more were left gagged and bound in places where they would not easily be discovered.

SO, AT last, came Ramey and Lake to their destination. And reaching there, they experienced the greatest surprise of their entire, hazardous journey. For the doors of Ravana's quarters, which they had fully expected would be guarded by not one man but a whole detachment, were not only without guard—but half ajar!

Ramey said exultantly, "Our army must have him in a dither! He's gone out to supervise the fight and left home-plate unguarded!"

Lake said, "It looks that way, but—it's not logical. Ravana's the kind of guy who looks after his own skin when the going gets tough. If the battle were going against him, he'd be locked in here with a whole damned army at the doors to protect his precious hide. I don't like it!"

Ramey chuckled. "Well, I'll be dogoned! And all this time I thought you were Lake. Hyah, Syd!"

Lake grinned. "Okay. I guess I do sound like the old gloom-monger at that. Well—let's get moving!"

And cautiously they crept through the doorway into the first of a series of connecting chambers which comprised the inner sanctum of Lanka's regent.

All the great courts lay silent. From afar, as if muted by granite blankets, still fitfully came to them the sound of distant fighting. But no footstep, no voice, marred the quiet of this refuge—No!—There *was* the murmur of voices! Ramey gripped his comrade's arm, whispered:

"In there! It sounds like—"

Lake nodded, eyes glinting. "Yes! Sheila!"

Feverishly, they crossed the last open space to the doorway beyond which they had heard the girl's voice. Revolvers drawn and ready, they inched open this ultimate barrier. As they did so, the faintly-heard drone turned into speech. Ringing defiance in Sheila's sweet, familiar tones.

"No! If I were the last Earth woman left alive and your brother the last male of a thousand worlds, still would my answer be the same! I want no part of Lord Ravana!"

Came the voice of another, a slow, throbbing voice Ramey Winters knew only too well. It was a voice which at once cajoled and taunted.

"Because there is—another, O Lady Sheilacita?"

"Perhaps."

"But if this one were to turn away from thee, and seek his pleasure in another? Say, for example—" In his mind's eye Ramey, though those who spoke were still invisible to him because of a heavy arras veiling the half-open doorway, could envision the languorous lids of the Lady Rakshasi drooping with heavy suggestion—"for example, myself? Then would your faithfulness waver?"

Sheila's answer was steadfast, unshaken, scornful.

"You speak of impossibilities, woman of Videlia."

"Okay!" Ramey nudged Lake. *"Now!"* And he brushed aside the drape, slipped forward into the retiring chamber where conversed the two women. "Well spoken, Sheila! Maybe her Ladyship will wise up to the fact that Earthmen aren't bought and sold with promises—after a while! Don't move!"

HE RAPPED this last to the Lady Rakshasi as, amber cheeks crimsoning, she stirred to rise.

"Stay where you are!" he commanded. "Sheila, come over here. That's right. Now, Rakshasi—where is the Bow your brother stole from me? Speak up! Or by the gods—"

But his answer did not come from the half-open lips of the Videlian princess. It came from a double source; the eyes of Sheila Aiken leaping open in sudden alarm, her cry, *"Ramey! Behind you! Look out!"*—and from a mocking voice accosting him from the chambers through which he had lately come.

"You want the Bow, Lord Ramaíya? It is right here in my hands—charged and eager to speak! Would you care to hear its message?"

Ramey whirled. Smiling mirthlessly,

the Bow drawn to his shoulder, advancing toward him was Lord Ravana!

Ramey cried, "He's bluffing, Lake! That Bow's not fueled! Rush him!"

And he ducked into a crouch, leaped a step toward the overlord of Lanka. But Ravana's sharp command was not delivered in the voice of one who tries a ruse. It stopped him short, because it was strident and heavy with assurance.

"*Hold!* Another step and you die! Not only you but your companions, also!"

Indecision trembled through Ramey. Then, measuring his chances, he took the path of caution. There was still a chance Ravana was pulling a fast one, but—Sheila! He must not needlessly imperil her life, or that of Lake. He stood still. But he said,

"The Bow is not munitioned, Ravana. If it were you would long since have turned it against those who storm your citadel. You would not waste it upon three individuals."

The grim lord of Lanka smiled at him sourly.

"I have said before, Earthmen, you are clever. You are half right in your conjecture. I cannot use the Bow on those who vainly attack Lanka—and for a reason not hard to explain. So far I have been able to obtain but a minute particle of the precious element. Such a scrap would not hinder an army. But mark me well! It is more than enough to dispose of you and those others who lead the uprising. So dare not my patience! *Seshana!*" He called the name, and at the farther end of the chamber whence he had come appeared that captain whom Ramey had once met on the mainland shore.

"Yes, my Lord?"

"Have a crier call word to my brother, Vibhishana, and to the Gaanelian, Sugriva, skulking off Lanka's shores in a draggle-tailed navy of rafts, that I hold as prisoners not only the Lady Sheilacita but also Lord Ramaiya and the laughing one, Lakshmana. If they bring not an end to these mad hostilities within the hour, warn them these hostages die!"

"Yes, Sire!" Seshana vanished.

COMPREHENSION overwhelmed Ramey Winters, leaving a bitterness on his palate.

"Then it was a trap. The unguarded doors . . . the open way to these chambers . . ."

Ravana laughed. "Aye, a trap, dog of Earth. Sometimes I fear you children of the green planet are all fools! Imagine a warrior idiot enough to leave in his wake an enemy unslain, merely bound! Long since we discovered one you had tied and hidden, learned your intention. The pathway was cleared that you might readier walk into our midst. And now—stand aside, Rakshasi! I will dispose of these creatures who have thrice pitted themselves against me."

Sheila sprang forward with a little cry.

"Dispose! You—you mean you're going to kill them? After having named them hostages against the surrender of our forces?"

"Even so, my Lady," replied Ravana mockingly. "It is not *my* folly to leave unharmed those who have proven dangerous to me."

"But your word, Lord Ravana! Your word of honor!"

"What Ravana does is to be judged by no man," said the Videlian haughtily.

"You dirty rat!" rasped Lake savagely. "Trick our friends into surrendering to save us, then shoot us anyway. Well—"

His sidelong glance at Ramey was

sign enough. It meant what Ramey had been thinking. That if they separated, rushed Ravana simultaneously, one of them might reach him. Ramey's muscles tensed, his lips framed the starting word. But even as he would have cried it, a warmth brushed by him. The Lady Rakshasi, a great, golden panther of a woman, strode past him to confront her brother boldly.

"A moment, my kinsman!" she pleaded. "You cannot do this thing! Have you forgotten our agreement? You pledged me the life of this Earthman, Ramaíya!"

"Stand aside, sister!" ordered Ravana curtly. "No longer do old pledges obtain. Since we struck that pact much has happened. The man has roused the rabble from my dungeons against me . . . threatened my citadel . . . . invaded my own private quarters. He must die!"

"He must live!" cried Rakshasi. "Even as you hunger for the Lady Sheilacita, so do I demand this human for myself! For the other I care not; wreak thy vengeance upon him if you will. But—"

And there would never, saw Ramey Winters suddenly, be a better opportunity than this! For sultry-faced, angry, the Lord Ravana had let the Bow slip from his shoulder. His eyes were upon his sister, his grip on the weapon insecure. Ramey's voice was like the crashing of a cymbal.

"*Now,* Lake!"

WITH the word, he leaped forward, head low, shoulders driving for the Videlian's legs as they had driven at the legs of opposing linesmen years ago. Beside him he felt the reassuring bulk of Lake O'Brien.

Then everything happened at once! H i s hands met . . . gripped . . . tightened about flesh. The body of the giant Martian seemed to totter above him; a shod foot lashed viciously into his temple, and great stars sprang from sudden darkness to whirl dazzingly before his eyes. He was aware of his own harsh, grating breath sobbing through his teeth . . . a roar of rage strangely mingled with terror . . . then a violent blast of flame mushrooming before him. Hot, searing flame that crisped the very perspiration from his brow, leaving his flesh baked and raw.

Then the solid thud of a fist meeting flesh . . . Lake O'Brien howling desperately, "My eyes, Ramey! I can't see!" And another soul-sickening sound. That of a woman's voice screaming in shrill, animal agony . . . dying abruptly in a low, choked, ominous gurgle.

Bruised and shaken, burned and dazed, Ramey staggered to his feet. All before him was still a blazing sheen of light, but now this dulled, and he saw that Ravana, still clutching a now-useless Bow, was fleeing across the chamber.

Ramey's automatic was heavy in his blistered palm. He fired it once . . . twice . . . after the rapidly disappearing figure. But in vain. Ravana had scuttled through the door, clanging it closed behind him.

Then, and only then, had Ramey time to look at the others. Lake was still beside him, was even now striving to rise, pawing before him as one who stumbles through a mist. He was groaning, "My eyes, Ramey! Sheila —I can't see!"

Ramey sprang to his side, lifted him.

"Easy, old boy! You'll be all right in a sec. The Bow going off in our faces, that's what did it—" But as he stared into his companion's face, saw that Lake's eyes were wide open, the entire cornea that covered his eyeballs

a fog of smoky-blue, he realized all too well what had happened.

Lake had looked directly into the flame of the Bow when its charge was released! And its incandescence flaming before him had blinded him as surely as if his eyes had been gouged from his head. Perhaps soaked up—as it had dried every ounce of moisture from Ramey's skin—the aqueous humor of his eyes. Only Ravana's kick, flattening Ramey, closing his eyes, had kept the young airman from sharing an identical fate!

And—Rakshasi?

He glanced about him wildly . . . found her . . . and turned away, shuddering. The Lady Rakshasi, great, golden panther whose every movement had been a lure and a temptation, would move no more. For upon her lithe and vital body had spent itself the full strength of the discharging Bow. That which remained of her once breathtaking loveliness was a blackened—*something*—not pleasant to look upon.

Nauseated, Ramey covered his eyes. Then Sheila was in his arms, crying, "Ramey! Oh, Ramey, she—she saved your life! Tried to tear the Bow from Ravana—*Lake!*"

Lake said dazedly, frightenedly, "Sheila—I can't see you! Where are you? Everything is black!"

Then a new sound rang clear in the farther chamber; the scuff of hurrying footsteps, the clank of mail. Winters spun to Sheila swiftly.

"Sheila, is there another way out of these chambers—a way leading down to the waterfront? Yes? Good! We've got to get out of here—and quick. Take Lake's other arm. All right, Lake, old boy, hold tight. We're going to get you to Doc Aiken if it's humanly possible!"

And huddled together like three fleeing the storm god's wrath, they raced in the direction that Sheila pointed.

CHAPTER XVIII

Stalemate

MANY sensations unfamiliar to a man whose work was purely a man's work had Ramey Winters experienced in regard to Sheila Aiken. From that hour long ago when she had dragged him from the wreckage of his burning Curtis on the plain beside Angkor Vat, he had admired her. Then, beneath the mellow moon of Chitrakuta, he had learned to love her. Now as they fled, side by side, through the avenues of Lanka, he discovered that admiration and love were not the only emotions she roused within him. There was another and stranger bond between them—a bond of fellowship! Sheila Aiken was no soft, comfortable creature to be fondled and amused. No clinging-vine, demanding lavish attention. She was a man's woman—a fighting man's woman—giving as well as receiving, daring the same risks that confronted her mate. Ready as he to fight—and if need be, to die—for the cause they had made their own.

And realizing this, noting the cool, earnest haste with which she directed their passage out of danger, seeing in her white hand the automatic she had taken from the now helpless Lake O'Brien, Ramey Winters felt surging through him a sharp, bright glory that this woman should be his!

He knew, now, that his final doubt had been swept away. Freely, when this travail was ended, he could ask Sheila Aiken to share life's future with him. For whatever that future might hold in store, he knew she would be a strong and steadfast companion.

These were but instincts, scarcely thoughts, racing through his brain as

they hurried down corridors of escape toward that section of Lanka which—if the gods were kind—their friends still held. This was neither the time nor the place to speak of such things. Strength must be husbanded, breath saved, for any danger which might arise. Such as—

Such as *this!* The sound of footsteps in a passageway crossing at right angles before them. Videlian guards, mayhap. Or worse still, a detachment of the fighting force!

Again, as several times before, Ramey motioned the girl to silence, forced her and the quiescent Lake to a spot of concealment until this new threat should pass. He sought a place wherefrom he might view those who passed. There was no way of knowing, in this crisis, what fragment of information might prove of later value. It was wise to learn any and all details of the Videlian strength, location of troops, designs . . .

Thus he lifted his head cautiously from behind the tremendous vase behind which they crouched as the footsteps drew nearer. And thus it was he saw that which broke a cry of gladness from his lips.

"Tauthus!"

THE Copt chieftain pivoted. He marched not at the head of an Earthling party, but beside Kohrisan and before a group of the ape-human's warriors.

"Lord Ramaíya! You have found the Lady Sheilacita? And—the Bow?"

Ramey shook his head. "Ravana escaped with it, and with his life. But it is not charged. Nor will it be very soon; that much we have learned."

The monkey-captain moved forward querulously. It was not easy to detect emotion on his simian features, but a note of apprehension was in his voice.

"And the gay one, Lakshmana? He is wounded?"

"Blinded," said Ramey succinctly. "He looked into the Bow's discharging gorge. But—this is not all that remains of our land-force?" He looked with sudden fear on the handful of men led by his two comrades.

Kohrisan shook his head. "Nay, my Lord. We are but a scouting party. Lord Vibhishana and Thalakka have pressed Ravana's hordes back to the vital wharves. Soon these will be ours, and our reserves can safely land."

"I'm going with you," decided Ramey swiftly. "Someone must take Lake and Sheila back to Vibhishana, though. One of your men will show them the way, Kohrisan?"

"I will do so myself, my Lord. With Tauthus and thyself in command, my company is well led. And there is much information I can bear to the others."

"Good! But have a care, my Captain. Ravana's men are spread somewhere between you and our main force. You run a gauntlet of danger."

Kohrisan said staunchly, "I shall be watchful, Lord Ramaíya. We of the 'new men' know how to face danger."

Ramey Winters could never have dreamed—what man could?—that one day his hand should press the hairy shoulder of a talking ape in firm companionship. But that is what he did now. And he said, "New men, indeed, are you and your comrades, Captain. And as worthy of the name as any."

Plainly, the move was not to Sheila's liking. But she was too good a soldier to demur. And it was evident that Lake must be taken to a place of safety. So she turned with Kohrisan; they disappeared, and Ramey pressed on with Tauthus and the ape-warriors.

AS THEY marched, Tauthus pointed out the purpose of their move.

"Our forces have rolled back Ravana's men at every point so far," he said. "We hold the northern chambers of the citadel and all levels below the fourth. Their heaviest concentration, though, is in the southern sector of the isle. This we cannot storm until our reinforcements land. Our boats cannot dock until the wharves are ours. Therefore the wharves must be taken."

"And our fleet?" queried Ramey. "How close does it lie to Lanka's shores?"

But Tauthus answered that question in the easiest of fashions—by pointing. For they had come to the end of the corridor, and stepped through a gateway out onto a balcony. With a start, Ramey realized where they were. On that same ledge from which the Lady Rakshasi had seen and exposed him!

Scarce thirty feet below them lay the wharves. And beyond these, bobbing flakes of black against the sun-silver surface of the lake, thick as skating-bugs on a stagnant bog, hovered the skiffs and rafts which bore the bulk of Sugriva's army.

Studying the salient, Ramey saw with dread despair the insurmountable difficulties his allies had to overcome. From the water, the wharves were invulnerable. Defenseless soldiers creeping into land on slow-moving skiffs would be scythed down mercilessly by the bows of the enemy. Nor was there any safe approach to the walled court wherein huddled the dock's defenders. Two high and sturdy walls stretched from the citadel itself down across the beach to the quais. Behind these ramparts a handful of men could withstand an army forever. And the Videlians numbered no mean handful. They swarmed the walls darkly. And at their beck and call, should they find need of additional hands to do their bidding, were the slaves. Two full pens of Earth's natives, locked like cattle in runways adjoining the courtyard.

Ramey said, "There's only one place to establish an offensive against the wharves—and that is from our present vantage-point. But it would be suicidal for us to try it. Maybe if we went back, gathered a stronger force—"

An astonished rumble from the throat of his comrade stopped him.

"Now, by my faith—!" swore Tauthus of Cush.

"What is it?"

"That captain. Look at him! Look closely!"

A small detachment, perhaps a dozen Videlians, had just marched from the interior of the citadel to join the besieged force. Neatly, swiftly, precisely, they swept across the courtyard. None rose to question them. The defenders had other things to think of, for from the southern end of the isle Vibhishana's attackers maintained a steady barrage of bowfire.

Ramey stared at the squad leader, eyes widening.

"It—it's Thalakka! But why—?"

"Traitor!" growled Tauthus deep in his throat. "I knew we should never place faith in a cursed Videlian. But Tauthus of Cush knows how to deal with traitors!" His hand flashed to his shoulder, he drew an arrow from his quiver, set it to bowstring, aimed . . .

"Wait!" Ramey's hand tensed about the Copt's arm. "This is no treachery but a most courageous deed. See! At the slave-pens—"

FOR suddenly the intention of Captain Thalakka was clear. Full across the courtyard had he and his men marched unchallenged . . . past posts they might have taken . . . and up to the gates of the slave-pens. And now the little detachment whirled, formed a tight circle before the gates

—and a cry rose as Thalakka gripped the sole guardian of those gates, hurled him to the ground, and wrenched the keys from his belt!

In an instant, all was bedlam! Too late the Videlian guards realized what had happened, identified this enemy in their very midst. Men turned from the walls, a hundred bows turned on the tiny knot of venturers. Feathered death spangled the court.

But the key had grated in the lock! And the gates were open. And Thalakka's voice was raising in clarion cry.

"Earthmen! Rise! Freedom awaits the bold—"

His cry ended in midsentence, his mouth formed a round O of astonishment . . . a circle from which, suddenly, a flood of crimson gushed. His hands leaped to his breast and tore at a shaft buried there almost to its feathered end . . . then he sank to his knees, rolled over, and lay still.

But not in vain had Captain Thalakka died. For at his words a tremendous surge, like the lifting of high seawaters, swelled through the prison-pens. And scarce had he fallen than a prisoner had whipped the sword from his hands to spring forward. Another . . . and another . . . and the slaves were plunging through the gates like an unleashed flood.

In vain, now, the arrows of the defenders hurtled into the roaring throng. Where one man fell, there were a dozen to charge forward over his body. This was no trained army, crisp, cool, efficient. This was a mob, a mob of men who had tasted slavery—and were now free to turn on their foes with naked hands and claws.

Like beasts they smashed across the courtyard to the ramparts, crushing beneath them all who strove to stay their passage. Like animals they clambered up the walls, flung the Videlians from their posts down to blood-lusting fellows below who literally ripped the Martain guards into bits.

And—the ramparts fell! Nor did Vibhishana give his enemy time to recuperate from this mortal below. Cheers rose from the loyalist camp, and up the beach stormed the followers of the former regent. Fighting side-by-side with the rebel slaves, they smashed the last, feeble resistance of Ravana's garrison. Then a guidon raised aloft, calling urgent invitation. The host of skating-bugs stirred into motion. And within the space of minutes, the first Gaanelian craft had moored at the docks of Lanka!

. .

NOT at all surprisingly, it was Red Barrett—the scrapping old redhead himself—who sprang from the first of the skiffs to dock. Close behind him came Syd O'Brien. The two were met and greeted by Ramey Winters who, with Tauthus, had scorned any slower method of gaining the scene of victory than to clamber headlong and recklessly down the rough walls from the balcony.

Thus, for the first time since ever war's hot flame had breathed over Lanka, met face to face all the captains. In triumphant conclave they gathered, all those who actively led fighting forces. Vibhishana and Tauthus of Cush, Ramey and Red Barrett, Syd O'Brien. Yet was their joy not complete. For there was one of their number fallen—Thalakka. And yet another whose part in the battle was ended.

"It's all right, Syd," repeated Lake O'Brien. "It's all right, I tell you. I—I don't feel any pain. It's just that I can't see."

Syd O'Brien's face was a thundercloud of rage. "We will find him, Lake," he promised. "And when we do—" His

strong, freckled hands whitened on the butt of his revolver. Here was one from whom the Lord Ravana could expect no grain of mercy should their paths ever cross.

Vibhishana said, "Lord Lakshmana must return to the mainland shore. If anyone can repair his vision, that one is the Lord Sugriva. And it were best the girl return, too."

"Me?" cried Shelia indignantly. "I will not! I—"

"Listen, Miss Sheilacita—" Barrett stopped, grinned embarrasedly. "Golly, listen to that! These guys got *me* talking thataway now, too! I mean, Miss *Sheila*—I wish you would go on back and tell Toots I'm okay. She'll kind of be worrying about me, I reckon. Tell her we'll all be coming home as soon as we clean up the rest of this mess."

Ramey said, "Yes, Sheila—please go. Because from now on, I'm afraid this fight isn't going to be very pleasant. Especially—" His eyes were cold—"for His Nibs!"

So Sheila and Lake returned to the mainland. Kohrisan, having completed the rally of his scattered forces, now came to join the conclave. And they took stock of their situation.

"WE HOLD now, my Lords," reported Captain Kohrisan, "all the northern half of Lanka's isle and citadel down to the Sounding Tower which is in the exact middle of the fortress. The wharves which feed to the Chitrakuta mainland are in our hands, too. Ravana still holds the upper levels of the fort, and all the southern sector, as well as the docks which feed to the opposite shore. But these are valueless to him, since the major portion of his fleet was captured by our men."

"Then there's no escape for him," grunted Syd. "We have him bottled up here, eh? Good!"

"But," interposed Vibhishana, "though we continue as the aggressors, he has *us* as affectively bottled as we him. We dare not leave the island nor relax our vigilance in any of the sectors we hold. He still numbers amongst his followers thousands.

"From now on, it appears to me that the battle must settle into a state of seige. From chamber to chamber, from corridor to corridor, through every room and avenue of Lanka must our forces battle for every new inch of ground."

"And that—" mused Ramey thoughfully—"is tough going. Suicidal business, as a punk named Adolph in our age is finding out! A deadly stalemate, eh, Lord Vibhishana?"

"I am afraid so, Ramaíya."

Barrett said, "But, lookit here— why can't we just pull stakes off the island entirely? Leave him here to stew in his own gravy, throw a cordon around the lake and make sure he never gets off to pester nobody again—"

Syd O'Brien shook his head.

"That won't do either, Red. Tonlé Sap is too big a lake. Seventy miles long. It would take ten times as many men as we have at our command to maintain a guard about its borders. Sooner or later, Ravana and his soldiers would get away. And, besides—" He glanced at Vibhishana—"there's always the possibility he may succeed in fueling the Bow once more. This time effectively. And if he does, we're licked. Isn't that right?"

"Unhappily," agreed the older man, "is it. No, our effort must be directed toward breaking the deadlock that now exists, somehow rooting him out of his lair."

Ramey said, "This 'Sounding Tower' you spoke of, Kohrisan—what is it?"

"The needle-which-speaks, my Lord."

"The which?"

"Kohrisan," explained Vibhishana, "has given it the name used by the natives. It is really a tower from the top-most chamber of which one can address the entire populace of Lanka in a normal voice, and have his message reach every ear in full, rolling tones. You have seen the talking idols of Chitrakuta?"

"Seen 'em?" chuckled Red. "We was their voice!"

RAMEY said, "I understand now. A sort of magnified 'whispering gallery,' eh? But, say—that gives me an idea! Lord Vibhishana, did not Thalakka often say that there were many who would rally to your cause if they knew you had been freed?"

"Aye, even so, Ramaiya."

"And I'll bet a hair," continued Ramey excitedly, "there are plenty of soldiers fighting for Ravana *right now* who would lay down their arms if they knew who they were being forced to fight! They've been obeying him blindly simply because they don't know what's going on. If we could reach the Sounding Tower—"

"—and tell them the truth—" broke in Vibhishana, "it would shatter the morale of his sholdiers. Split them into separate camps. Create rebellion within his very ranks. Aye, Ramaiya, I believe you are right! It is a far stronger likelihood, at any rate, than that we can overwhelm the isle without losing much of our own manpower."

"Then—" cried Ramey, rising eagerly, "why are we sitting here jabbering? There's a better place to talk from. Let's go! No—not all of us. You, my Lord Vibhishana, so the soldiers can hear your voice . . . you, Red, and Kohrisan—"

"—and me," added Syd O'Brien. "There's a chance we might meet up with Ravana on the way."

CHAPTER XIX

"A New Man"

LIKE a needle of stone rising from the great, gaunt citadel of Lanka was the Sounding Tower. This saw Ramey before he and his companions deserted the open air and dipped once more into the castle itself, seeking the inner passage which led to the tower's base.

Swift was their passage at first, hurrying through ranks of their own men, sweeping through corridors and ways whose granite floors proved all too well the cost at which the advance had been made. Lord Vibhishana, shaking his head at sight of these grisly scenes, said sorrowfully, "Though we win our cause, yea, even though the last of my brother's hirelings pay in full for the havoc he has wrought, not in a thousand years shall the citadel of Lanka be cleansed of this horror, this blood and this disgrace. It is a shame upon my soul and on the name of Videlia that these dead lie about us."

Even the Captain Kohrisan, whose valor Ramey Winters knew well, seemed shaken by what he saw. He said puzzledly, "Would that the Lord Sugriva were here to advise me. I cannot understand. Ever it was my belief that men are kind and noble and good. They are the rulers, the Chosen Ones. Why, then, must they slay and be slain? Even we of the jungles do not wantonly kill. For our loins or bellies, for warmth and safety—for these things only do we attack other beasts."

Ramey answered him gravely, "In your time and in my own, Kohrisan, man has proven himself more the brute than the mute beasts over whom he

claims superiority. Do not ask me why this is; I do not know. All I can hope is that you new men will bring to us something of your own jungle sense."

A spasm passed over the little ape-human's face. As ever, it was difficult to read what emotion he portrayed. He said anxiously, "You—you do not mock me, Lord Ramaíya?"

"Mock you?"

"The Lord Sugriva, who gave us human speech, human thought, told us we were, indeed, 'new men.' But oftimes I wonder if this be true—or if he spoke only from kindness and sympathy. It was the habit of Lord Ravana to taunt me and my brethren. 'Parodies of man,' he called us. 'Poor imitations masquerading in human dress—' "

But his plaint was left unanswered. For now they had come to the opening at the base of the tower. A spiral staircase loomed before them, winding around and around the inner wall of the needle to its uppermost chamber. A swift estimate by Ramey placed the tower's height at approximately two hundred feet. It was hard to guess accurately, for the spiral staircase was interrupted now and again by platforms, rendering the top of the tower invisible from below. Shafts of light pierced openings at intervals, but for the most part the needle was shadowy and silent.

IN SINGLE file, with Vibhishana leading, then Ramey, then Kohrisan and Syd, they started up the staircase. Past one stage . . . then another. A third. At the fourth level the one-time regent of Lanka stopped wistfully for a moment to look down upon his isle through one of the openings. What he saw brought a gasp to his lips, and the others running to his side. He pointed an anxious finger.

"Below! See—warriors approaching the Tower. Was it Tauthus' plan to send a detachment after us, Ramaíya?"

"It was not!" said Ramey bluntly. He followed the direction of his friend's gaze, stared, and pulled back from the opening. "I don't like this."

"Whats' wrong, Ramey?"

"If I'm not mistaken, that is a detachment of Lord Ravana's men. They're heading for this tower. We're trapped in here!" He thought swiftly for a moment. "Well—no use standing here worrying about. There's only one thing to do. Get to the speaking room and let Vibhishana put on his little broadcast. If need be, we can call for assistance from topside. Tauthus will hear us and send a force to our relief. Come on!"

And at redoubled speed, he plunged forward up the staircase. Past the fifth level and the sixth. To the last chamber. At its entrance he halted triumphantly.

"We ought to be all right now. Let them enter if they want to. We can talk as long and loud as we wish, and they can't stop us. Moreover, if they try to rush us—"

A grating voice from *behind* interrupted him.

"I think they will not rush you, Lord Ramaíya. My guardsmen came to the tower's base for only one purpose. To bottle you within its walls.

And Vibhishana cried, *"Ravana!"*

The Lord Ravana smiled. It was a smile that had no amusement in it, and little of brotherly affection. He said, "Ah—it is my own blood-brother! Greetings, Lord Vibhishana. These are giddy heights, are they not, for one grown used to the cool depths of dungeons? *Nay, Ramaíya!"* His cry cracked like a whip. "Reach not for the weapon-which-thunders! Lord Ravana needs not experience the same dan-

ger twice to learn its nature. Hurl it to the floor! Aye, and you, too—"

He paused, his brow contracting swiftly as he looked into the face of Syd O'Brien. Something akin to awe broomed his dark features.

"But—but you are Lord Lakshmana! This cannot be! The Lord Lakshmana was blinded. By my own hands—"

RAVANA was far from alone. Had he been so, Ramey's gun would long since have barked its lethal message. But behind him, at the entrance of the chamber they had sought, were ranged a detail of his bowmen, weapons poised and ready. Now Ramey said, "The Lord Lakshmana—"

"—needs not sight," interrupted Syd O'Brien suddenly, loudly, "to know that he stands before a dog whom even the lowest gutter might reject. Where are you, Ravana? My hands hunger for your throat—"

And a swift thrill coursed through Ramey as he realized how Syd O'Brien had spun to his advantage Ravana's error. For the sombre twin, eyes fixed and empty, was stumbling forward, groping aimlessly at vacant space.

Ravana laughed, and easily sidestepped Syd's hands. In his own hands dangled the useless Bow of Rudra. With this he jabbed the "blind man's" body tauntingly.

"It will take one with sharper eyes than thine to catch Ravana, Earthman," he gibed. "Aye, this is a curious web of fish my net has seined. A blind man, a weakling and an ape!"

"What are you doing up here, Ravana?" asked Ramey.

"What else but setting the trap for what logic told me would be your next move? It was your intention to speak to my warriors, was it not, brother Vibhishana? Appeal to them, perhaps, to lay down their arms? Well—you climbed these heights to speak, and speak you shall. But mine shall be the commands you relay. Ah—you would still play games with my, my little mole?" He chuckled and sidestepped again as Syd O'Brien, still lurching with arms outstretched before him like a sleepwalker, touched his sleeve. Deliberately he struck Syd across the cheeks, laughed and stepped back as Syd swung blindly toward him. "Come, brother! Address your soldiers. Bid them lay down their arms. Come—"

He crisped a command to his bowmen. They fell back to admit Vibhishana to the speaking-tower. Momentarily their weapons lowered. And as they did so . . .

"Quick, Ramey! Get the Bow!"

It was the "blind man," Syd O'Brien. Like a flash, he had sprung upon the Lord Ravana, gripped the giant's arms in a viselike clasp, spun him around so he was between the guards and his companions, a living barrier the Videlians dared not risk assaulting.

And instantly Ramey leaped forward. But fast as he moved, there was one even faster who raced before him. The small ape-human, Kohrisan. Like a darting streak of furry brown he was at Ravana's side, wrenching the Bow from the Videlian's hands, crying, "Back, Sidrughna! We have what we need! Back!"

He half-pushed, half-kicked Syd O'Brien away. His prehensile arms locked about the Lord of Lanka like bands of iron. *"Back!"* he cried again.

WITH a mighty exultation in his heart, Ramey obeyed the monkey-captain's cry. Herding Vibhishana and Syd before him he whirled and tore for the steps . . . hurtled down them at breakneck speed, ten, fifteen feet to the lower chamber. His free right hand, as he ran, tore at his jacket

pocket. The pocket in which he carried that which would fuel the Bow . . .

Then they were in the midway chamber of the tower, and from both top and bottom of the edifice came the hoarse cries of Ravana's men. The chamber had no door. Ramey's gun and that of Syd still lay on the floor above. The Bow must be fueled! And within seconds—or it would be too late!

"Kohrisan!" cried Vibhishana. *"Kohrisan!"*

The tiny ape-warrior tumbled, rather than ran, down the last few steps, threw himself on the floor of the chamber. He was gasping for breath, crying weakly, "Fuel the Bow, O Ramaíya! Fuel and destroy—"

The cylinder was open. With reckless haste, Ramey pounded the aluminum objects into it, crammed closed the top. It did not matter, now, that the Bow was overcharged. Life hung by a tenous hair on this next split-second of time. He roared, "Back from the doorway, Syd! Out of range! *Back!"*

And as Syd charged toward him, there loomed in the doorway Ravana. A raging-mad Ravana flanked by his bowmen. The Videlian's eyes were aflame with hatred, fury.

"This time, dogs," he screamed, "you die!"

To his bowmen he howled a command. The archers' arms drew back. And then—

Ramey pressed the release grip of Rudra's Bow!

WHAT happened next transpired so swiftly that none afterward could find its vision in his memory. There was a whining scream that rose and tore at the eardrums of all who stood behind the Bow. Then a sheet of blue-white flame that sprayed from the Bow's wide arch with the speed of light. Then bursts of crimson, bright and horrible, where had stood men. A searing hiss . . . a crumbling . . . the crash of masonry . . . a frightful gust of heat, the backwash of which blistered even those who stood behind the Bow. And then—silence!

Ramey's fingers fell from the trigger of the Bow as he stared before him dazed, shaken, uncomprehending. Where a moment before a horde of warriors had stood beside Ravana in the doorway, now there was neither Ravana, bowmen—nor doorway! Everything—*everything* had disappeared! Even the portion of the town wall beyond the doorway. A great, jagged hole, whose edges still dripped molten stone gaped where the Bow's tremendous flame had devoured all.

From the dimness below came howls of terror. There sounded also the blur of running footsteps as the vanguard of Ravana's army fled the base of the tower in stumbling panic.

Ramey cried in a voice that cracked with urgency, "Now, Lord Vibishana! Now is the time to speak! Up swiftly to the sounding-chamber!"

The regent nodded, and was gone. Within the space of seconds his voice was rolling out over all Lanka, speaking words none could help but hear.

"Hark, Videlians . . . Gaanelians . . . Earthmen . . . all who hear my voice. It is the Lord Vibishana who speaks Long lay I prisoner in the dungeons of Lanka. Now I am free—"

"Ramey!" called Syd O'Brien.

"Listen!" replied Ramey. "The sounds of battle below have ended! Everyone is listening to Vibishana—"

"—Ravana is dead!" boomed the Videlian overlord. *"My brother is slain, victim of his own lust for power and the dreadful Bow of Rudra. Lay down your arms, all you who followed him. Amnesty will be granted all those who—"*

"It—it's Kohrisan, Ramey. He

wants to talk to you."

Ramey turned. He had not realized until this moment that the squat ape-human had not risen from the chamber floor. Now, hurrying to Kohrisan's side, he understood why. The hairy captain held one fist clenched beneath his right breast. And from beneath the curiously manlike fingers of this hand oozed a sluggish stream of scarlet.

"Kohrisan!" cried Ramey. "The bowmen! One of them loosed his shaft before I pressed the grip—"

The small captain smiled feebly.

"Nay, my Lord," he choked "It was even before that. In the chamber above. When I held Ravana . . ."

"That *we* might escape! Well, hold on! We'll hurry you down to the citadel. Medical aid—"

"There is no need of that now," whispered Kohrmisan. "It is too late for medical aid . . . my Lord. I did what I could . . . Ramaiya. It was what a man . . . a *true* man . . . would have done. Was it not?"

A mist veiled Ramey's eyes, and a tight band knotted about his throat. He answered huskily, "And why should it be otherwise, Kohrisan? You, too, are a true man."

"Nay, my Lord! But a *new* man."

Then his eyes, contented and proud at the end, rolled suddenly back, thick, Simian lips drew back from bloodless gums, and Captain Kohrisan was gone. Ramey lowered the tiny body from his knee and stood up.

"There died," he whispered softly, "a human heart in a jungle body . . ."

CHAPTER XX

Children of Legend

"BUT my Lord Sugriva," argued Ramey desperately, "I see no reason why you should leave Earth *now*. Our battle is won. Ravana is dead, Vibhishana sits on the throne of Lanka and henceforth there will be peace between Gaanelians, Videlians, and the children of this planet. Your guidance and advice are needed if Earth's civilization is ever to attain great heights. Earth has need of you—"

But the blue-skinned Gaanelian shook his head sadly.

"No, Ramaiya. Earth needs no tutelage from an outside source. Vibhishana and I have pondered deeply, and our decisions agree. Our two planets established colonies here with the intention of sparing your young world the woes and hardships through which our civilizations passed.

"But our experiment was a failure—nor was this the fault of Earthmen, but ourselves. I was a weakling and a dreamer; one ambassador from Videlia proved himself a power-lusting tyrant. It was an evil example we set those whom we presumed to instruct. Therefore, we shall return to our own worlds, leaving Earth's children to work out their own destinies. With me shall go the 'new men,' for now, too late, I realize it was a dreadful wrong I did them when I made them neither man nor beast, but part one, part the other."

Vibhishana said soberly, "Sugriva speaks truly, my son. What great Plan governs the actions of all intelligent beings, I do not know. But this much is certain: that no one race should presume to set up rulership over all others. I am a son of cloud-cloaked Videlia, Sugriva of the desert world. To these planets, when the next spacevessel arrives some months hence, we shall return—forever. Nor shall men of our planets ever again set conquesting foot on Earth. That we pledge.

"Perhaps not again shall children of our three worlds meet until, in future

ages, Earthmen have developed a culture equal to ours. Then, not as rulers and serfs but as equals all shall we form a solar trinity."

"Ramey said, "It is not mine to argue with you. But what is your plan for us?"

"The decision is yours to make. You may stay here, if you so desire, or return to the future era whence you came. The time-machine waits below. You know the method of its operation."

Ramey stared at the huge idol standing on the dais before them. The great altar of Chitrakuta seemed to await his decision breathlessly, as did the girl whose hand touched his own. Ramey turned to Sheila. "Well?" he asked.

"We return," she said simply. "Isn't that what you want, Ramey?"

Ramey nodded. It was his own desire. To return to the world he knew best. He grinned and turned to the others.

"Well—that's it, then. All aboard, gang. Time-machine leaves on Track 3 in five minutes."

BUT curiously none stepped forward to join him and Sheila. Red stared at his companions impatiently.

"Well, what's the matter? Doc, are you ready?"

Dr. Aiken coughed apologetically.

"Sheila, my dear," he said to his daughter, "I—I am not returning with you. I am an old man. There is not a great deal of time remaining in the hourglass of my years. I would spend those last remaining sands seeing new things, learning secrets all men have longed to know. Sugriva has said I may return with him to Gaanel. It is a temptation too great to resist. You—you understand, my dear?"

Sheila cried, "But if you don't return, daddy, then neither will we. Ramey and I will remain with you—"

"No!" the archeologist's voice was firm. "No," you *must* return! Someone must carry back to the Twentieth Century a knowledge of what we have seen and done here in a forgotten age. You bear precious knowledge, vital information, to Earth's scientists. You alone can read the cipher of Angkor Vat, tell men whence it came and why, and where vanished its once mighty populace."

Ramey said, "We alone? But you speak as if Sheila and I were the only ones returning!"

Syd O'Brien spoke for the twins. He said, "I can't take Lake back to our time now, Ramey. The machine would set us in a desolate spot, perhaps in danger. And he is blind. Here he can receive medical care. Perhaps, later on, after Sugriva has lifted the veil from Lake's eyes—as he has said he can and will—we will join you again. But for the time being— Well, you see how it is."

"Then you, Red? You're surely coming with us?"

Red Barrett shifted uncomfortably from foot to foot.

"Well, keed—I think maybe I'd better not. I asked Sugriva about Toots, here. He tells me she couldn't take a ride in the time-machine without being —well, without having happen to her what happened to Rudra. You see, she wouldn't have no true existence in the future. So—so I think I'll just stick around for a while. Me and Evavne is going back to Britain, where she come from. Maybe I can be some help to them folks of her'n. Like—" he grinned suddenly—"like teaching 'em to talk good English instead of that stuff they talk now."

"And you, Sheng-ti?"

The *bonze* said quietly, "When Sugriva leaves, Ramey Winters, departs from Earth for many centuries the light

of wisdom, peace and truth. These people, though they were born in a different era, are still my people. Someone must stay at Chitrakuta to help them reestablish themselves on a new footing. It is my clear and simple duty to be this one."

"Were the choice mine, Ramaiya," said Tauthus, "*I* would visit that future world of thine. But I cannot. So, like Sheng-ti, I shall go to my people. Much have I learned here at Chitrakuta; much more will the Lord Sugriva teach me. Then will I hie westward to bring something of the Gaanelian culture to my race."

. .

THUS told each member of the party his intentions. Nor would argument sway any from his decision. And so it was that, some time later, Sheila and Ramey stood alone beside the trapway to the time-machine of Rudra. Their last farewells had been made, the last hand shaken. Unless in years to come others should make the journey.

"When you return," Dr. Aiken bade them anxiously, "read well and carefully the wall-graven scripts at Angkor Vat. Before we leave Chitrakuta we shall see that all this history is carven on the walls. That and much other knowledge, lest your memories fail you. Remember!"

"We will remember," promised Ramey. Then he handed Sheila into the metal cube out of which—was it days, weeks or a lifetime ago?—they had risen into the strange, stirring world of the past. The trapdoor closed above them with a *clang!* of finality. Ramey moved to the lever which hurled the machine through Time . . . pressed it. . . .

WHEN the needle had at last traversed the dial, betokening the end of their journey, Ramy climbed once again to the trapdoor which was the machine's exit. Cautiously he lifted it an inch . . . then a foot . . . then threw it back with a cry of gay relief.

"Empty, Sheila! The Japs have gone I guess they got tired looking for us." He chuckled. "No wonder. After all, we were there a couple of weeks Coming?"

He helped her from the cubicle. Then, remembering Sugriva's last instructions, he set the dial of the machine to its return position, hooked a length of fine wire about the control lever and spun the length of the wire through the trapdoor into the altar-room wherein they stood.

"This is our key," he said, "to them. And theirs to us. The doorway to Chitrakuta is always open so long as it remains."

And he pulled the wire. They heard no sound, felt no tremor, but as if it were a wraith dissolving in weaving mists, the outline of the time-cube thinned . . . wavered . . . and disappeared. Only a length of fine wire, whose dangling end hung curiously taut in midair, lent reassurance that the way to another world was still open. Ramey coiled the wire and concealed it beneath the pediment of a statue. Then he rose, emotions strangely chaotic. A sadness was upon him at leaving comrades beside whom he had fought and laughed and lived a great adventure. But he was glad, too, to be back in a world he knew, a world he could understand. . . .

A call from Sheila roused him from his brief reverie. "See, Ramey? This was one of the carvings which always puzzled us most. Its meaning was obscure—then. But now it is simple to read."

And she pointed to one of the huge scenes carven on the temple walls. The scene of a frightful battle, a battle be-

ing waged by apes strangely garbed in the habiliments of men and towering giants. One corner of the great stone tapestry showed a fleet of crowded ships rushing in to a harbor, still another showed an ape-human dying with a great wound in his breast, while beside him, loosing a lightning bolt from a gigantic bow, stood a man. . . .

"THEN they *did* carve the record!" said Ramey hallowedly. "It—it gives me the creeps, Sheila. We just left them. We know they're still alive, and that this artistry is not yet even planned. But here it is—and here it has been for five thousand years. The story of the battle for Lanka."

"And its hero?" queried Sheila oddly. "Ramey—do you know the full meaning of this story? The earth legend which has grown up about it?"

"Legend? You mean there is a legend about *this?*"

"About *us!*" Comprehension, which had been dawning slowly in Sheila's eyes, now flamed sudden and complete. "I see it all now! All! But surely daddy must have—Yes! He did—at the end. That is why he insisted we must return to our time. To clear up the ancient mystery—"

"What legend?" repeated Ramey perplexedly. "It's all over my head, Sheila. I don't get it at all."

"Then listen! Does this make sense to you, Ramey? *'And there were in those days four companions, Rama, Bharata, and the twins, Lakshmana and Satrughna—'*"

"Hey! Those sound like the whacky handles we were tagged with at Chitrakuta! They called me 'Ramaiya,' and Lake was 'Lakshmana'—the smiling one—while Syd was 'Sidrughna'—the frowning one—"

"There would be slight changes," agreed the girl excitedly, "over a period of centuries. Pronunciation and spelling would change, of course. The legend goes on: *'Rama, by possession of an enormous Bow, formerly the dreaded weapon of the god Rudra, wins for a wife Sita, daughter of Janaka. Rama attracts the attention of a female demon, Rakshasi, and infuriated by his rejection of her advances, she inspires her brother Ravana with love for Sita.*

"'In consequence of this, the latter is carried off by him to his capital, Lanka. Rama sets out with his companions to her rescue. After numerous adventures they enter into an agreement with Sugriva, king of the monkeys, and with the monkey-general, 'Anuman —'" *

"'Anuman!" repeated Ramey. *"A new man!* So in the legend his fondest dream becomes his *name?* But what *is* this legend, Sheila? An obscure folk-tale—?"

"It goes on," half-laughed, half-sobbed the girl, "to tell of the attack on Lanka . . . the bridge built by the monkeys . . . Ravana's death at Rama's hands! Everything is in it, Ramey—everything we have known and lived! An obscure folk-tale! It is anything but that. It is a tale from the *Ramayana*—one of the Sacred Books of the Hindu religion!

"You are—or were—the prototype of a hero worshipped by a quarter of a billion humans in our day . . . the third greatest religion in the world. You, Ramey, are the god Rama!" *

RAMEY stared at her dazedly. "You mean," he said, "that the adven-

* The persistent legend of a monkey-leader named 'Anuman (or Hanuman) is one of the oldest and best-loved tales of Asiatic peoples. His name and a record of his deeds may be found in the ancient records of pratically all Oriental sects. —Ed.

tures through which we have just lived were not of our own making? That they happened before, ages ago in Man's history?"*

"Yes, Ramey. Don't you see—that adventure has *always* happened! This solves the argument daddy and Syd had about the immutability of Time. What things are, *were,* and always will be. Centuries ago, into ancient Chitrakuta came seven strangers from a future world. Having found their way into a Time which was not theirs, it had to be that when their Time came they must return to fulfill adventures written in the book of used-to-be.

"Your crashing here at Angkor Vat . . . our escape in the time-machine . . . these events had to take place in order that an ancient legend might be fulfilled. That was our predestined path, and there was never anything we could have done to change it. It was as stoppable as a glacier."

"And—and the others? Sheng-ti? Tauthus?"

Sheila's brows congealed. "I do not know—exactly. It is told that an ancient king of the yellow race, he whose name gave a mighty empire its name, was called 'Ching-tse.' And Tauthus of Cush—ancient Cush became Egypt, you know. And the Egyptian records claim their 'light-bringer' to have been a god named 'Thoth.' . . ."

BUT not now, nor soon, nor perhaps ever could these strange wonders be decided. Nor did this seem to Ramey Winters that they should linger longer, at this time, in the cold, forsaken walls of Angkor Vat. So gently he drew the girl from before the panel.

"We must go now, Sheila. There is much we must do here, but now is not the time to do it. Much may have happened since we left. War threatens Indo-China; for all we know war may have started since we left. We have the food and blankets Sugriva gave us. A long journey lies before us to Thailand. To friends and safety. We'd better get on our way."

So stepped the two from Angkor's lonely halls into the green-veiled sunlight of the tropics. Gray were the walls and spires they left behind, but grim no longer, nor menacing to two who knew their story. Someday, knew Ramey Winters, someday when war's insanity had died in mankind's bosom, they would return to read more fully the carven messages of friends they knew and loved. Someday. . . .

But not now. Now they must leave gray Angkor and seek their future beyond the flaming jungle-lands. Long was the way, and dangerous perhaps; apes chattered in branches carpeted with moss; marsh and morass, wild beast and wilder man, these were the hazards they must pass.

Yet somehow they felt no fear. There was lightness in their hearts and in their steps as hand-in-hand they stepped forward to meet whatever fate might bring.

* The reader is recommended to a closer examination of the *Ramayana,* sacred book of the Hindus, procurable in an inexpensive edition at almost any well-stocked library. The portion here reduced to its essentials is but one of many amazingly fascinating sections.

In connection with this, it is interesting to note that the god Rama is considered to be but one of the seven Avatars (or reincarnations) of the god Vishnu. Hindu theosophy admits of many things scoffed at by modern, practical science: reincarnation, demoniac possession and "invasion of other world creatures" being but a few.—Ed.

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SATURN—THE RINGED WORLD

(Concluded from page 157)

those rings "left over matter" that was arranged into rings by the play of overlapping and interlocking fields of gravity and is that, generally speaking, a common occurrence? Or is Saturn unique in our galaxy, the *one* case where for a short time centers of condensation are lacking? And are we witnesses only because of the incredible coincidence that we evolved in just this particular solar system during the short time while that unique formation lasted?

There are no answers. Or too many. And each time somebody looks at the blue rings the enigma deepens.

SQUADRON OF THE DAMNED

(Concluded from page 153)

shipped back for trial and punishment on Earth," he said. "Under the circumstances, the Legion can make one of its rare exceptions and release you two from service. You can return to Earth at any time you like."

The two brothers looked at one another. Clark, bloody and weary; Ricky ragged and battle grimed. They exchanged grins.

Outside, the siren bugle, cool in the silence around Cepani, sounded the mellow notes of "All Clear."

The Divisional Commander looked back at them.

"Hell, Sir," Clark and Ricky declared in one voice, "we're just beginning to enjoy our enlistments!"

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AUGUST ISSUE

AMAZING STORIES

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IN our April, 1942, issue, we ran a contest called "The Perfect Trap" which was an uncompleted story by Miles Shelton in which the hero was so tightly trapped it seemed impossible that he could release himself. We asked our readers to solve the hero's problem. Here are the winners of that contest. The answer will be published next month.

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Checks have been mailed to the winning contestants. Congratulations to all three. You proved yourself very clever and resourceful in your excellent solutions.

MAMMOTH JULY ISSUE

fantastic ADVENTURES

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Weird were the circumstances under which three such different tribes met. When the petite and lovely Linda Carstairs first visited the Time-Travel agency, McGregor threatened to resign; he thought his boss, Barry Rudd, had lost his love of adventure! But it wasn't a trip of just a few years back that Linda sought. She wanted to go back 34,000 years in time to find her father, who had mysteriously disappeared. Intrigue, death and romance awaited the "Safari to the Lost Ages" . . . one of the ten great stories you'll want to read in the thrill-packed July issue.

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DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

MAY RATINGS

Sirs:

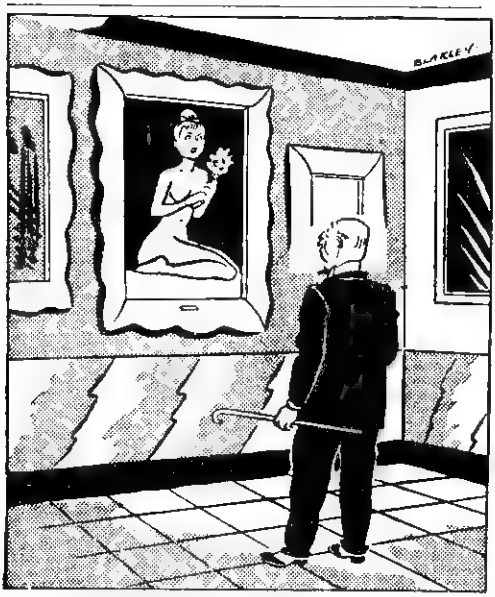
The following is my rating on the May issue of AMAZING STORIES. 1. Lord of the Crystal Bow. 2. The Case of the Mesozoic Monsters. 3. The Return of Lancelot Biggs. 4. The Crystal Planetoids. 5. Horsesense Hank Does His Bit. 6. Destroyer from the Past. 7. The Incredible Slingshot Bombs. 8 Caveman Meets Blonde. 9. Arctic God. 10. Juggernaut Jones, Salesman. 11. Sutton's Strange Voyage. 12. Twenty-four Terrible Hours (Cabot's slipping). 13. Martian Miniature.

The art work was, as usual, very good. Jay Jackson's best. Krupa's worst. This guy Pemble is ok. Keep 'im on the art staff. Back cover was nearly as good as a Paul cover.

Articles were all swell.

CHARLES NUTT,
3025 Ainslie St.,
Chicago, Illinois

Thanks for this list. As for Cabot, what do you think of his story in this issue? Yes, we will keep Pemble. How about our other new artists? We'll try to keep the articles swell.—Ed.



"Certainly you saw me move! What of it?"

DETECTIVE WORK

Sirs:

Although I am no Sherlock Holmes, I would like to make some deductions and check with you on them. In September, 1940, you told of the coming of a story called "The Invincible Mr. Ellsworth" by Frank Patton. In July 1941 a story called "The Invincible Crime-Buster" appeared, by Henry Gade, which, by the way, was a very good story. The titles were so similar and the fact that an "Ellsworth" appeared in the "Crime-Buster" excludes all possibility of coincidence. Are Henry Gade and Frank Patton the same person, or did you turn the plot over to Gade? I am mildly curious, so please enlighten me

LINDSEY VINCENT BENET,
(no address).

Mr. Patton, whom you remember as the author of "The Test Tube Girl," sent us an uncompleted draft of the story we forecast, then was forced to abandon it because of a text book commitment (he's an eminent professor, you know). Very generously, he donated the plot, and the uncompleted manuscript, which we turned over to author Gade. Later, when the story was completed, we changed the title, and it appeared as you read it. Does this explain your "detective puzzle"? We know that both men appreciate your praise of the story.—Ed.

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Sirs:

I am a new reader of your wonderful magazine, and am delighted by the selection of material in the book. I first found out about it when a friend of mine lent me one of your reissued 3-in-one books. That was about three months ago. Ever since then I have read every one of your *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures*.

In my opinion, Don Wilcox is by far the best writer you have. My favorite type of story is about time-travel. "The Lord of the Crystal Bow" by Duncan Farnsworth is the best of these that I have read.

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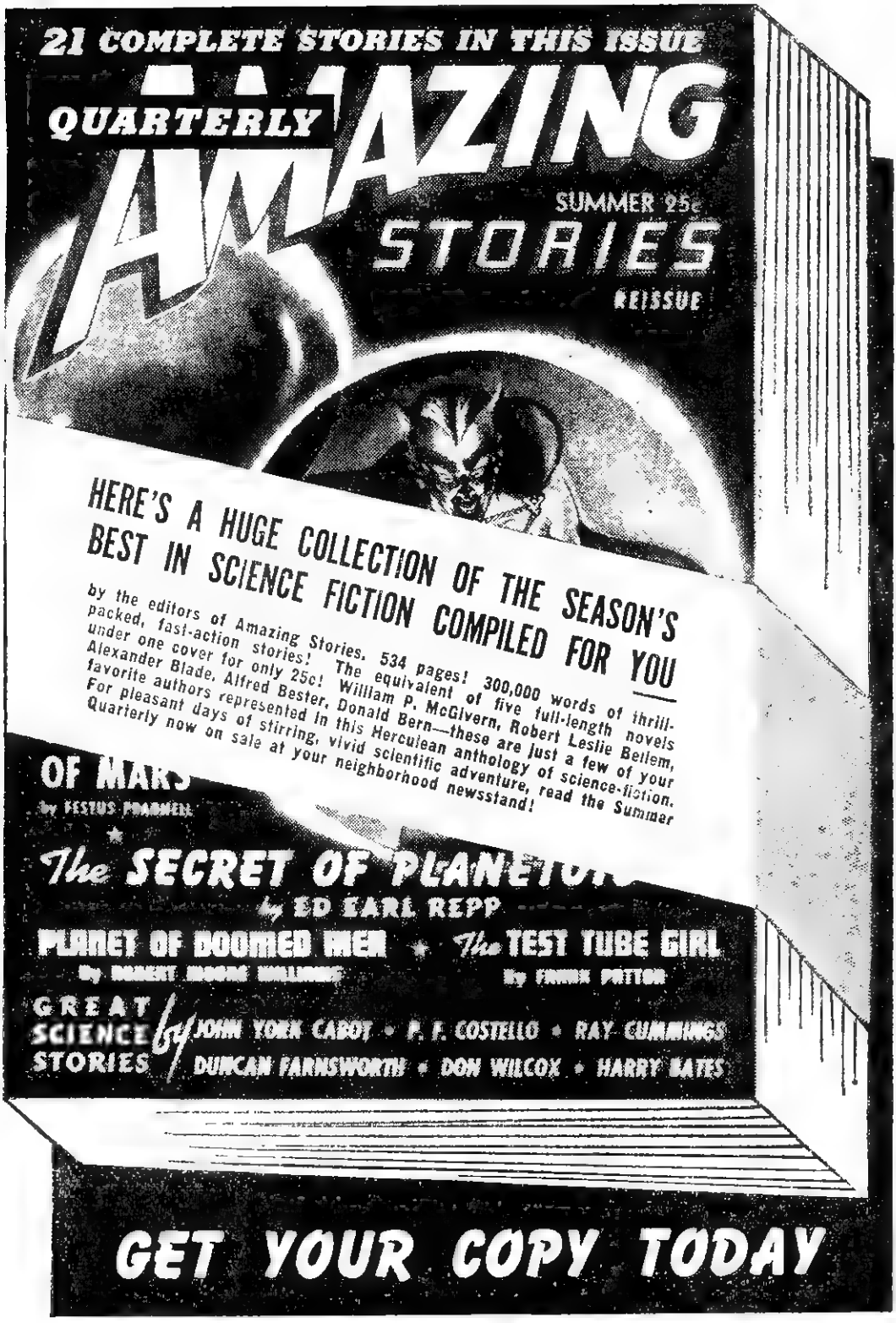
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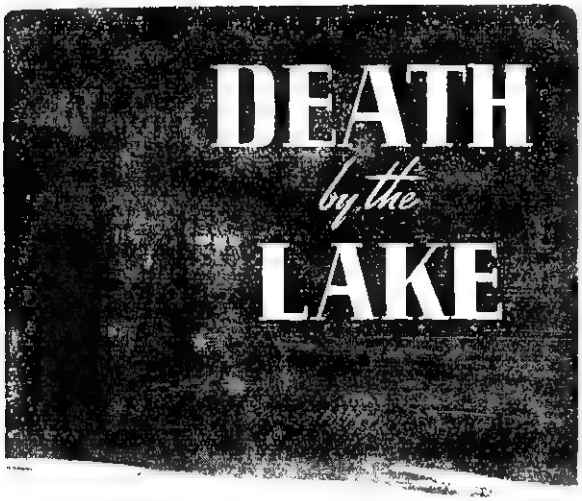

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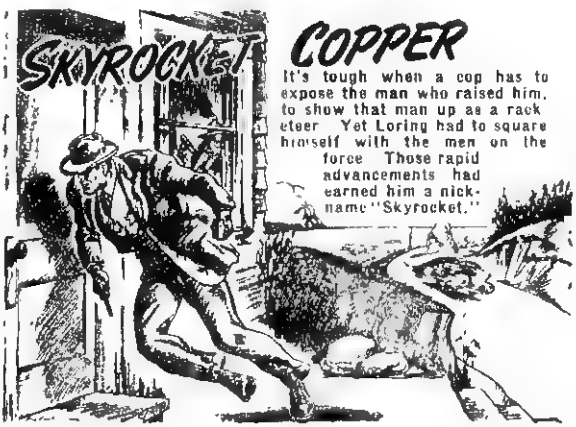

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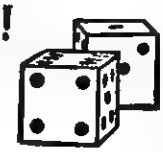

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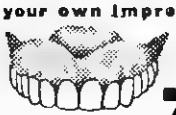

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RADIUM AIRSHIP OF SATURN

By HENRY GADE

Copper, disintegrated by radium electrons, produces the propulsion power of this ship

SATURN is the most fascinating planet of them all, insofar as our interest in the solar system is concerned. It draws its popular interest from the beautiful rings which encircle it; caused, scientists say, by a satellite which crumbled into bits and continued on in its orbit in a scattered band of debris

Some scientists claim that the moon of Saturn which disintegrated, did so because of the action of a great amount of radium in its makeup.

On Saturn, which has a tremendous gaseous envelope, we would find an amazing airship indeed. We would not find a ship with wings, nor even a torpedo-shaped ship. The atmosphere is so dense that traveling in it would be comparable to traveling through water; not a liquid, certainly, but definitely a powerful resistant force.

The shape of the ship might be roughly in the shape of a giant cone, its nose a projectile shape, wherein the propulsion motor would be located This motor would react through the center of gravity of the ship, and would not be part of a continuous cone, but merely connected to the main body of the ship by a series of open girders

The body of the ship would be a huge hollow ring, like a doughnut, suspended from the head or projectile.

Mounted on this ring would be the radium ray projectors, which would concentrate four separate beams of electrons on a specially prepared copper core in the nose of the projectile, which would be lined with an oil-thin coating of a substance closely allied to the mythical neutronium

This copper would be exploded, or broken down into free atoms, which would be expelled from the projectile, down through the "hole" in the doughnut, and would "pull" the ship through the air just as a stream of compressed air moves a torpedo through the water.

Four radium projectors would allow for very careful directional control, because the angle of escape of the gases would be controllable by reflection from the carefully computed curvature of the inside reflecting surface of the projectile. Increasing the rays from one projector would turn the ship in the direction of the location of that projector. Other angles could be achieved by a combination of measured intensity of rays from two or more projectors.

Saturn is a world of huge storms and turbulent atmosphere. And it is also a world where the surface is rocky and mountainous. Perfect landing control would be necessary, and this ship would be able to ascend and descend in a perfect vertical, with positive speed control, moving, if necessary, only an inch at a time. With this motor, such delicate control would be easy.

The flow of power could be so delicately regulated, and would be so steady that the ship could be held suspended in midair, absolutely motionless

The capacity of this ship would be 112 passengers and a crew of 48. The crew would consist of projector operators in their turrets, three men to a turret, four radium control men in the lead-lined radium rooms (they themselves would wear suits of lead much like diving suits), eight relief men, to work in three shifts, and eight navigation men and officers. A crew of ten stewards would care for the wants of the passengers, and six cooks would comprise the galley-crew.

This ship would be capable of trips of 50,000 miles across the vast surface of Saturn. They would rise to the stratosphere, and attain a speed of 500 miles per hour At this height, the ship would be vertical to the planet's surface, and the gravity insulation shield would be applied, normal gravity substituted by an artificial gravity in the base of the ring portion of the ship itself.

Passengers quarters would be staterooms entirely ringing the outside of the ship, and all rooms would be outside rooms. A circular corridor would run through the center of the "doughnut," and another around the inner surface.

The inside ring of the ship would be coated with the neutronium-like metal, to keep the copper blasts from penetrating the ship with harmful radiations.

The weight of such a ship on Saturn would be far greater than our largest liner, perhaps as much as a quarter of a million tons, due to the size of Saturn. A powerful ship indeed!

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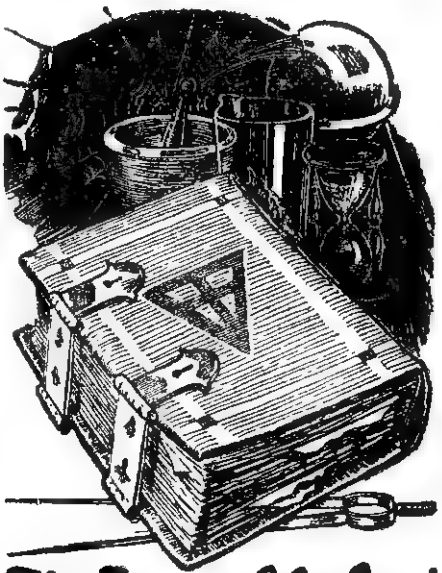

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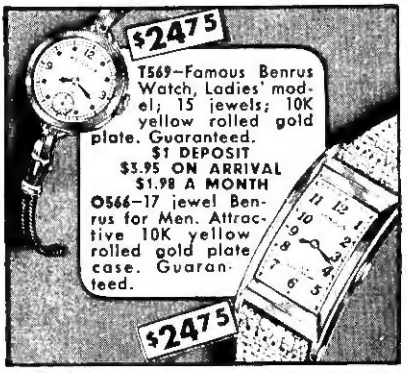

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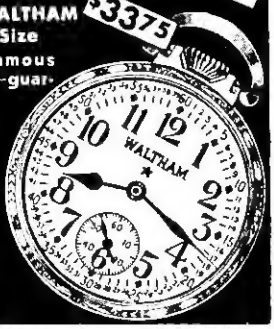

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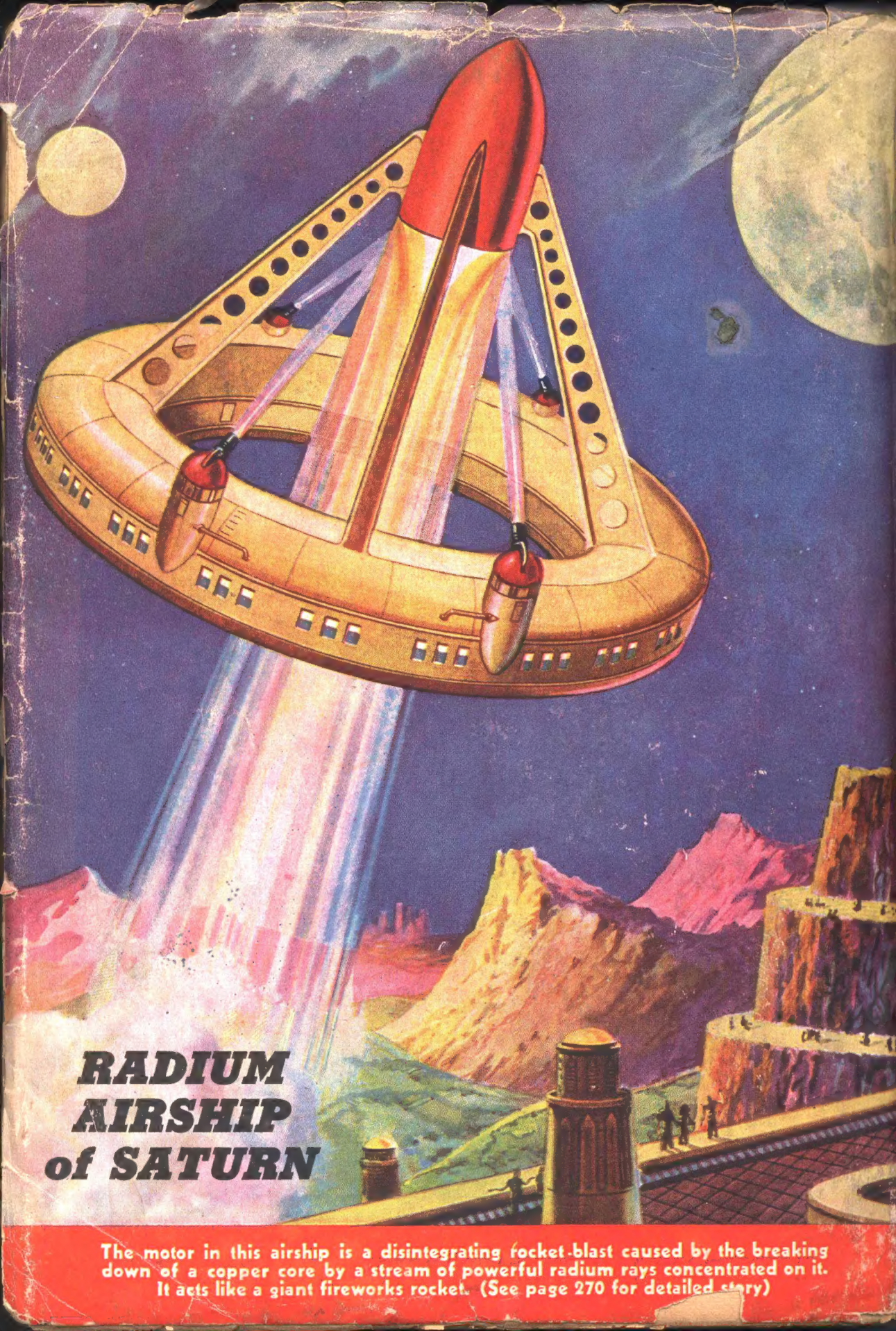

The motor in this airship is a disintegrating rocket-blast caused by the breaking down of a copper core by a stream of powerful radium rays concentrated on it. It acts like a giant fireworks rocket. (See page 270 for detailed story)